

Reconsidering *Relational Aesthetics*

**Temporality, Exchange and Commodity Aesthetics in Recent
French Art**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

First published in 1998, *Relational Aesthetics* is an extended essay by the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics* considers how art of 1990s had the potential to facilitate relationships. In France, the text and exhibitions of 'relational art' were largely ignored. However, following its publication and translation into English, in 2002, *Relational Aesthetics* suddenly became the centre of contemporary art, with the terms 'relational' art and 'relational aesthetics' being banded around exhibitions, biennales and art writing across the globe. With this attention came criticism, predominantly from Anglophone scholars who focused on the theoretical misgivings of *Relational Aesthetics*. Rather than using the theoretical issues of *Relational Aesthetics* as its point of departure, this thesis focuses on 'relational art' and 'relational aesthetics' as a socio-historical product. Paying particular attention to these critiques and the conditions in which 'relational' art materialised, this thesis begins by contextualising *Relational Aesthetics*. This thesis then questions the concept of the 'relational' through a close reading of a 'non-relational' artwork, Jean-Luc Moulène's *Documents: 24*, and *39 Objets de grève* to assess the limitations of *Relational Aesthetics'* focus on a narrow set of artistic practices. Returning to the Anglophone critiques, this project considers the notion of exchange in 'relational' art, again, paying attention to examples of 'non-relational' art by Matthieu Laurette to demonstrate the consideration of exchange in interhuman relationships facilitated in artworks of the 1990s. This project concludes by *reconsidering Relational Aesthetics* as a series of artworks and ideas that are responses to, and have shared interests, in challenging temporality through examining Pierre Huyghe's *L'Association des Temps Libérés*. Using the term *contretemps*, this thesis proposes that 'relational' art and 'relational aesthetics' can be understood as spaces for encounter that disrupt the temporalities of the everyday. Thus, this project offers a *reconsideration* of *Relational Aesthetics* and 'relational' art practices as inherently linked to the context in which they were created, as an undoubtedly 'French' phenomenon of the 1990s.

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Introduction

On December 24th, 2019, a huge crowd gathered outside the Palais Garnier in Paris. Situated in the ninth arrondissement, the Palais Garnier occupies a prestigious space in French cultural history. Built at the behest of the then Emperor, Napoleon III, in the 1860s, the Palais Garnier is a theatre that is home to the French national ballet company, the Ballet de l'Opéra national de Paris [Paris Opera Ballet]. The ballet company, which was first founded in 1669, along with the theatre, are steeped in tradition and are considered today as integral markers of, and monuments to, French history and culture both in France and across the globe. Indeed, articles on the Palais Garnier website proudly announce the role of the ballet and the venue itself in hosting stars [*étoiles*] of the past, ranging from Bridgit Bardot dancing alongside Michel Renault in the late 1950s, the backstage performances of Merce Cunningham and John Cage's ballet, *Un jour ou deux* [*A Day or Two*] in the early 1970s, to lists of the ballets choreographed and performed by one of the most influential dancers of the past century, Rudolf Nureyev.¹ That afternoon, on Christmas Eve 2019, the crowd outside did not gather in the hope of catching a glimpse of any contemporary *étoiles*, nor were they waiting in line for their chance to see a festive performance of *The Nutcracker* before heading home to celebrate with families and friends. The crowd, made up of locals, tourists, journalists and media crews, sat in near silence as they watched ballet dancers perform the fourth act of *Swan Lake*. However, the crowd had not gathered to witness this performance via a projection like they might have done when watching live broadcasts of the World Cup final the previous year on outdoor screens across the city, or like the popular open-air cinemas hosted at La Villette, a park in the North-East of the city, each summer. Instead, the crowd were witnessing the performance of *Swan Lake* as it happened, in the flesh. The performance took place in front of the Palais Garnier as a troupe of dancers, accompanied by members of an orchestra, performed for the crowd. The decision to perform the fourth act of *Swan Lake* was significant; the musical score for this act of the ballet is well-known worldwide, and, as one of the dancers told journalists, 'this is one of the most difficult ballets', a ballet that represents the 'years of sacrifice and daily work' that the dancers commit to in order to be chosen as part of the company's rigorous selection programme.² After the performance, photographs and video footage of the event were shared online and news outlets around the world featured stories of

¹ See: L'Opéra national de Paris, 'Histoire', *L'Opéra national de Paris*, 2020, <<https://www.operadeparis.fr>> [accessed 12 February 2020].

² Alexandre Carniato quoted in France 24, 'Les danseuses de l'Opéra de Paris se produisent dans la rue pour défendre leurs droits', *France 24*, 24 December 2019 <<https://www.france24.com/fr/20191224-%C3%A0-paris-les-danseuses-de-l-op%C3%A9ra-en-gr%C3%A8ve-interpr%C3%A8te-un-extrait-du-lac-des-cygnés-sur-son-parvis>> [accessed 6 January 2020]. Unless otherwise stated, texts have been translated from French to English by the author.

the ballet dancers dancing outside in the midst of winter to a huge crowd of intrigued onlookers.

For this particular performance the choreography, music and costumes remained unchanged. If an audience were to pay to see this performance inside the Palais Garnier the same music would be played, and the dancers would take the same steps that they had been honing in the many rehearsals that would have preceded the on stage performance. But this performance was not an act of charity; it was not a case of the ballet company's efforts to practice 'public engagement', nor was it part of the opera's 'widening participation' plan.³ The setting for the performance did, however, differ from those that had been before. Before going any further it is imperative to address the fact that this thesis is not about ballet at the Palais Garnier, or anywhere else for that matter, nor will it offer any further insights into *Swan Lake*. This project is not about the dynamics of crowds or public engagement in the world of dance and it will not offer an assessment of the pertinence, or effectiveness of how news stories are shared online in contemporary digital practices. So, why start a thesis with something that seems insignificant to the majority of what is about to follow? What is the relevance of an act of a ballet being performed outside on one cold, wintry Christmas Eve to the context of this project? As the dancers performed, they did so in front of two hand painted banners that hung between the archways of the Palais Garnier's grand façade. Against the stark white of the canvas background, in red and black font, the first banner read '*OPÉRA de PARIS en GRÈVE*' [Paris Opera on Strike], whilst the other declared, '*la culture en danger*' [culture in danger]. Employees of the Palais Garnier and Paris Opera were on strike, but they were not alone. As the dancers and musicians performed for the masses outside, they were doing so in response to the widespread industrial action across France that, by the time of the public performance of *Swan Lake*, has reached its sixth consecutive week. In the weeks and months preceding this performance, public sector workers across France had withdrawn their labour in a series of strikes that immobilised certain facets of daily life; public transport was restricted as railway workers and air traffic controllers went on strike; schools were closed as teachers joined protests and picket lines; lawyers downed tools preventing courts from proceeding with cases; police officers took to the streets to rally against working conditions, and now, cultural workers were on strike, leading to the closure of theatres and museums throughout the country. Across France, workers were striking in protest against proposals from the French president,

³ Incentives to open up the opera house to younger audiences has been attempted through the introduction of initiatives such as *Pass' Jeunes Opéra* [Youth Opera Pass] in 2018 that offers discounted tickets to events at the Palais Garnier, Comédie-Française and l'Opéra Bastille for those under 28. See: L'Opéra national de Paris, 'Pass' Jeunes', *L'Opéra national de Paris*, 2020 <<https://www.operadeparis.fr/programmation-et-billets/offres-spectateurs/pass-jeunes-opera-comedie-francaise-2021>> [accessed 13 February 2020]. See also: Tobias Grey, 'An Unlikely Youth Revolution at the Paris Opera', *The New York Times*, 19 February 2018 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/19/arts/music/paris-opera-young-audiences.html>> [accessed 13 February 2020].

Emmanuel Macron, that would result in pension reforms raising the age of retirement from 62 to 64. Alongside extending working years, many professions would lose out on the pensions that they had once been promised through Macron's proposal to streamline the system, taking it from its current formation of 42 different pension options dependent on sector, into a single system based on points.⁴ Although the strike action against pension reforms that had been initiated by rail and transport workers had been ongoing for several months, and had been galvanised by the support of the *Gilets Jaunes* [Yellow Vests] movement that had begun the previous year in response to frustrations over rising oil prices and living costs, the performance of Swan Lake before the Palais Garnier became emblematic of the contemporary social unrest that was facing France.⁵ After the performance, footage of the dancers and musicians circulated worldwide leading to articles being published with titles such as 'Now even ballet dancers are downing tools over Macron', and 'In Paris, Even the Ballet Dancers are on Strike Over Pensions'.⁶ Here, although the relevance of this to the current project is yet to be discerned, it should be also noted that this thesis is not an effort to analyse the *Gilets Jaunes* movement, a movement that, at the time of writing, is still going strong. This is not to say that research cannot be conducted into ongoing protest movements or social unrest but, rather, that the long term efforts and impacts of the *Gilets Jaunes* are still relatively unknown, and so such a study would benefit from the distance and perspective that can be afforded through time. It is here that this thesis hopes to build upon through taking the privilege provided with time and distance to offer reconsiderations of art and society in recent French history. At this

⁴ News Wires, 'French Doctors, Lawyers, Pilots Protest Pension Reforms', *France 24*, 17 September 2019 <<https://www.france24.com/en/20190917-france-doctors-lawyers-pilots-protest-pension-reforms-macron>> [accessed 4 January 2020].

⁵ The term '*gilets jaunes*' refers to a grassroots social movement that first began in France in November 2018 as a protest against the rising costs of fuel and living expenses. The name of the movement '*gilets jaunes*' is used in response to protesters' decision to wear high-visibility yellow vests, something which all motorists have been required to carry in their vehicles, by law, since 2008. Since the first protests in 2018, each Saturday protestors have congregated in towns and cities across France to protest against current government proposals and rising inequalities in French society. Since its inception, the *gilets jaunes* have been instrumental in establishing regular protests and public manifestations of resistance across different sectors in society, including supporting the *gilets noirs* movement – a movement which began in Paris in July 2019 with undocumented migrants (*sans papiers*) occupying the Pantheon in order to highlight the sanctions and injustices which they face in their day-to-day lives – and the more recent general strike action. See: Angelique Chrisafis, 'Who are the gilets jaunes and what do they want?', *The Guardian*, 7 December 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/03/who-are-the-gilets-jaunes-and-what-do-they-want>> [accessed 3 April 2019]; Mathilde Mathieu and Rouguyata Sall, 'The Gilets Noirs Are in the Building', trans. by David Broder, *Jacobin*, 28 July 2019 <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/07/gilets-noirs-france-protesters-sans-papiers>> [accessed 30 July 2019].

⁶ Kenan Malik, 'Now even ballet dancers are downing tools over Macron', *The Guardian*, 29 December 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/dec/29/now-even-ballet-dancers-are-downing-tutus-over-macron>> [accessed 29 June 2020]; Madison Mainwaring, 'In Paris, Even the Ballet Dancers Are on Strike Over Pensions', *The New York Times*, 15 January 2020 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/13/arts/dance/paris-opera-ballet-strike.html>> [accessed 12 February 2020].

point this is all very well and good, and it may seem that a certain effort is being made to deliberately obscure the subject matter that this thesis takes as its root. This, however, is not intentional; this is not a deliberate attempt to build suspense or to delay the inevitable – in which case it may be a pertinent time to re-ask an earlier question, how is this relevant to what will follow in this thesis?

The strike action that took place in 2019 was the greatest that France had seen since 1995, when, in response to the then government's plans to alter pensions and extend working hours, workers withdrew their labour and took to the streets for a series of protests and strike actions that lasted from June until December.⁷ A few weeks before the first general strikes were announced, on May 1st 1995, a group of workers spent their *jour fêrié* [bank holiday] at their place of work. However, as with the dancers and musicians performing outside the Palais Garnier, workers were not on site to earn more money; there were no promises of their employers offering double-time to compensate for workers' spending their national holiday at their workplaces. On this particular bank holiday, known in France as *La Fête du Muguet* or *La Fête du Travail*, and in Anglophone contexts as 'Labour Day' or 'International Workers' Day', the workers and their friends were invited to their place of work to participate in a series of activities that were not associated with the workplace's usual capacities.⁸ The activities varied but were centred around building teddy bears that would be made up of the components that the workers would create throughout the day, before culminating in a teddy bear picnic-style gathering between all attendees at the end of the day. This event had not been organised by the workers or employers themselves; there were no efforts on behalf of management to 'thank' workers for their continued efforts on a dedicated national holiday through offering a chance to relax and enjoy a 'family fun day'. As with the scene outside the Palais Garnier, the day's events were not a directive from management for 'public engagement'. Instead, employees had been invited to participate in events by Philippe Parreno, then a relatively unknown, young artist interested in mixed media work and site-specific installations. In the same sense that the performance of *Swan Lake* was significant for its complexities, in the event facilitated by Parreno the decision to enact this event, titled *Werktische* [*Workbenches*], on International Workers' Day, was significant in raising questions surrounding the nature of

⁷ Le Figaro avec AFP, 'La grève contre les retraites égale désormais celle de 1995', *Le Figaro*, 26 December 2019 <<https://www.lefigaro.fr/social/france-la-greve-contre-les-retraites-egale-desormais-celle-de-1995-20191226>> [accessed 6 January 2020].

⁸ Today, May 1st is more commonly known in France as *La Fête du Travail* and parades are held across France to celebrate the achievements of workers and union movements. However, May 1st is also known colloquially as *La Fête du Muguet* [Celebration of Lily of the Valley] due to a tradition dating back to the 16th century when the then king, Charles IX, passed a law making it legal for anybody to sell lily of the valley on May 1st of each year. This particular flower is thought of as a *porte-bonheur* [good luck charm] and many May 1st parades incorporate the flower into designs for banners celebrating workers' contributions and achievements. See: Arnold van Gennep, *Manuel de folklore français contemporain* (Montdidier: Picard, 1943), pp. 1444-1445.

work and histories of labour activism. Or, as art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud would later describe *Werktische*, ‘the idea to create a factory of sorts of hobbies and pastimes was a great success for generating a sense of immersion amongst workers’.⁹ It is this sense of ‘immersion’, or ‘collectivity’ that would later come to define some of the earlier examples of Parreno’s work, including *Werktische*. The idea of facilitating events or being an ‘immersion amongst workers’ is significant in its posturing of the capacity of art to either create relationships, or to use relationships as the basis for artworks. In offering events that rely on a degree of involvement from what might traditionally be thought of as ‘spectators’, or ‘agents’, art could be seen as offering spaces in which possible encounters between people might take place. Through participation in, or viewing of, particular artworks the idea of interhuman relations as a medium is brought to the foreground, thus opening a dialogue surrounding the relationships on which art might be premised, or, in which art is the forum for the facilitation of such relationships. *Werktische* is just one example amongst many of an artwork created in the 1990s that seemed to combine an interest in, and response to, the current affairs and social context in which it was created. It is not farfetched, then, to suggest that an artwork interested in the concept of how work has been understood and celebrated, given its ‘performance’ on International Workers’ Day, was also created around the same time as workers across France were considering mass walk outs to protest government proposed restriction on workers’ rights and pension benefits. However, maybe somewhat surprisingly, discussing this artwork as a product of its specific social context has not yet been explored. It is this particular point on which this thesis is premised. In order to understand artworks that seem to use relationships as their basis, it is important to consider how and why this seemed pertinent at the particular moment in which these artworks were created. After all, how useful is it to consider art in a vacuum, or as some sort of entity divorced from its immediate environment? A short answer might be ‘not very’.

Premise for a Study

The idea of art reflecting the time in which it was created is hardly new. For decades art historians have wrangled with the question of offering a ‘social history of art’, a history amongst many others, that presents readings of objects as products of the contexts in which they were created. In such accounts the objects in question are examined as results of often complex cultural and economic conditions that have been glossed over or, in some instances, completely ignored in previous accounts.¹⁰ What is it to attempt to understand artworks

⁹ Nicolas Bourriaud, ‘14 novembre 2011 - Conférence expo Traffic’, dir. by Sylvain Mavel (CAPC Archives, 2011) in CAPC Archives, Bordeaux [accessed 15 January 2019].

¹⁰ For early proponents of social art history see the work of Meyer Schapiro (1904-1991), particularly his essay ‘From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos’, first published in *The Art Bulletin* in 1939, where he discusses how the co-existence of different architectural styles in medieval Spain was indicative of

through the lens of formalist critique when such works seem to arise from their immediate environments? And how is it that such artworks have been, and continue to be, interpreted according to the odd, oft-assumed, demarcations used to discuss 'art' as separate from 'life' or 'society'? This thesis does not attempt to answer the riddles posed by classification and separation between what might be considered as 'art', 'art history', 'social history', and 'life'. However, to this end, this thesis builds upon the notion of offering a 'social' history of the artworks on which it is premised, meaning that the focus on interpreting these objects comes from the perspective of the creation, and in some cases exhibition, of these works at the specific moments in history in which they appeared. As will be discussed later in this thesis, there are inherent issues in 'tracing' histories of objects or artworks; it is all too familiar, and too neat, to argue that an artwork is 'z' because points 'x' and 'y' preceded it. Although the linearity of history is one favoured in particular philosophical circles, the usage of chronology in certain aspects of this thesis is speculative and used more so out of convention than a commitment to *proving* any sort of predetermined causalities amongst sources and examples cited. An awareness of the complexities of this approach are apparent, for example, in discussing the 'emergence', a term loaded with ideas relating to the gradual or burgeoning appearance, of particular sources. In attempting to offer a 'social history' of the artworks discussed, there is also a realisation of the importance of not glossing over specific details, of not treating the 'social' as a homogenous entity, or of considering 'history' as a totality in and of itself. In short, specific devices deemed useful to the writing of narratives, such as chronology, are used tentatively here rather than as corroborators obliged to provide watertight alibis for the hypotheses presented. At the same time, to consider an object as a product of its context relies on a degree of 'tracing' its influences and origins, in piecing together the various fragments that led to its creation. Whilst being used, to a certain extent out of convention, the chronology and samples cited as preceding the various 'emergences' discussed in this thesis are, hopefully, justified and readers are able to understand why particular dots have been connected at particular moments.

In a similar vein to offering a 'social history' of art, the idea of art forming relationships is hardly new either. Again, for decades art historians and critics have spoken of the relationships that art can create, usually paying attention to the complexities at play in

social and economic changes in the these societies in the late 11th century. See the work of Arnold Hauser (1892-1978), too, in particular, *The Social History of Art*, first published in 1951. This four volume set analyses how meaning has been generated in art throughout history depending on context. See, also, the work of T. J. Clark (b. 1943) whose research has focused on modern and contemporary art history in relation to the contexts in which it was created, particularly French art from the mid-late 19th century and modernism. See: Meyer Schapiro, 'From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos', *The Art Bulletin*, 21:4 (1939), 313-374; Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art, vol. 1-4* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), and T. J. Clark, 'On the Social History of Art' in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Francis Francina and Charles Harrison (London: Harper & Row Ltd, 1982), pp. 249-258.

relationships between artworks, artists and spectators; what relationships can be generated in *viewing* an artwork? How might the spectator imagine themselves within the artwork itself? Can an audience relate to an artwork that they are engaging with and, if so, does this make such an experience more authentic, more *real*? Such questions are endless and attempts to resolve quandaries of this nature habitually lead to whiling away hours tracing arguments that try to encompass the minutiae of individual experience within particular spheres of philosophical thought.¹¹ Whilst these debates can be interesting, if these topics are of interest to the reader, of course, studies in this area appear infinite when trying to consider the nuances of *experiencing* art. This project does not provide *evidence* of experiencing artworks. No surveys, for example, were conducted; gallery visitors were not asked to rate their experiences of the artworks discussed on a scale of 1-10, nor were they contacted in the months or years following their interactions with such works in the interest of seeing whether visitors were able to maintain long-distance relationships of sorts with the artworks encountered. Perhaps this is a decision born of practicality, the ethics at play in ‘disturbing’ visitors in galleries or observing ‘participants’ is outside the realms of this particular project.¹² Imagine, for instance, the horror or embarrassment that might be felt by the researcher after interrupting a blossoming relationship between artwork and viewer. Even if the researcher attempts to establish a relationship with the viewer, at the expense of the viewer’s relationship with the artwork, efforts to probe these relations of sort might inevitably lead to conversations around whether visitors found everything they needed in the gallery shop, or asking ‘on a scale of 1-10, how likely, or unlikely, are you to visit this gallery café again?’ before making awkward chit-chat about the lack of gluten-free sandwich options available. Whether a chance meeting or longstanding kinship, the nuances of individual experiences of artworks or relations forming between art and those *experiencing* it are not featured in this thesis— although there may be a niche for a

¹¹ See, for example, the work of Aloïs Riegl (1858-1905), an Austrian art historian whose work on the influence of Hegelian thought on perceptions of spectatorship has provided a model for subsequent art historians and thinkers to probe the nature of relationships between artworks and viewers. Other studies in this area, such as Brian O’Doherty’s, have discussed how the medium of an artwork and the context in which is viewed has an impact on the role of a spectator as a ‘data-gatherer’. More recently, critical theorist Jacques Rancière has offered an account of the politics of spectatorship by analysing what it *is* for art to *be* political in response to arguments that audiences are passives. See: See: Aloïs Riegl and Benjamin Binstock, ‘Excerpts from “The Dutch Group Portrait”’ *October*, 74 (1995), 3-35; Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of Gallery Space* (San Francisco: The lapis Press, 1976), pp. 35-52; Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London; New York: Verso, 2011). For critiques of spectatorship that question Western categorisations, see, for example, the work of bell hooks who discusses the perception of and ‘gaze’ of black women by linking this to a history of oppression by white colonisers. Darby English’s study of ‘black art’ also illuminates on the nature of relationships established between artist, viewer and artwork through an interrogation of the complexities imposed by the term ‘black art’. See: bell hooks, ‘The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators’, in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, ed. by bell hooks (Boston: South End Press, 1992), pp. 115-131; and, Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

¹² See: Emily Pringle, *Rethinking Research in the Art Museum* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2019).

project of this nature elsewhere. To this end, then, the relationships discussed in this thesis are those that appear to be the basis for some of the artworks in question. This thesis considers artworks that, at first, seem to use relationships or, at the very least, show an interest in facilitating relationships of sorts - the basis and nature of which will be examined according to specific examples and contexts throughout this study.

An analysis of the intersection of art as a product of *its* time and space, and of art producing a specific sort of sociality, or *relations*, has not yet been attempted within the context of the artworks that form the basis for this study. To a certain extent this is a task that has already been undertaken elsewhere in art history; for example, considering how the use of the human body in performance art or *l'art corporel* [body art] offers insight into political contexts of the twentieth century.¹³ Yet in France, in the 1990s, there was a call to interpret particular artworks as 'relational'. First mentioned in an article in the journal *Documents sur l'art* in 1995 by Nicolas Bourriaud, then a burgeoning curator and correspondent for the magazine *Flash Art*, the term 'relational' was used to refer to artworks that had the ability to form interhuman relationships [*les relations interhumaines*]. 'Relational' art was art that, more often than not, used the nature of interhuman relations as a sort of medium in and of itself.¹⁴ This idea of art as 'relational' was expanded upon in an exhibition catalogue the following year. In 1996, Bourriaud curated the 'Traffic' exhibition at CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux [CAPC Museum of Contemporary Art, Bordeaux]. It was this exhibition, and the accompanying catalogue text, that sought to welcome and establish the term 'relational' as one that can be used to describe contemporary works of art. In the catalogue Bourriaud penned a short introductory text titled 'An Introduction to Relational Aesthetics', in which he stated that 'relational' art 'is not the revival of any movement or comeback of any style,' in a sense, offering a break from the past, or a degree of *newness* in 'relational' art that was unparalleled in the archives of art history.¹⁵ To ground this claim, Bourriaud described 'relational' art as 'a tool for linking human beings and groups to one another,' positing that 'the work of art in the 1990s turns the onlooker into a neighbour and interlocutor'.¹⁶ At the time the exhibition and catalogue text, as will be further examined in this thesis, went fairly unnoticed. Critics were unimpressed by the notion of spectators being transformed into neighbours through a shared act of viewing or interacting with the specific artworks grouped together by Bourriaud in the

¹³ See, for example: Mathilde Ferre and Marie-Hélène Colas-Adler, *Groupes, mouvements, tendances de l'art contemporain depuis 1945* (Paris: École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 1990), pp. 34-43.

¹⁴ See: Nicolas Bourriaud, 'For a Relational Aesthetic (Part One)', *Documents sur l'art*, 7 (1995), unpaginated.

¹⁵ Nicolas Bourriaud, 'An Introduction to Relational Aesthetics', trans. by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, *Traffic* (Bordeaux: CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 1996), unpaginated.

¹⁶ Bourriaud, 'An Introduction to Relational Aesthetics', unpaginated.

name of 'Traffic'. Despite this, the lack of critical appraisal did little to quell the notion of 'relational' art, with Bourriaud writing an expanded essay on the subject that was first published in French in 1998.

Esthétique relationnelle is an extended essay where Bourriaud outlines characteristics of what he thought connected the art of particular artists working in the mid-1990s. It is here that Parreno's *Werktsche* is mentioned as one of the first examples, amongst many others, of artworks that have the potential to create relationships amongst those engaged with them.¹⁷ In this text, Bourriaud writes of 'relational' artworks as those which 'involve methods of social exchanges, interactivity with the viewer within the aesthetic experience being offered to him/her, and the various communication processes, in their tangible dimension as tools serving to link individuals and human groups together'.¹⁸ The forms that 'relational' artworks could take remained undefined and open to interpretation. In the essay little attention is paid to the composition or *material* of the artworks themselves. Under the rubric of the term 'relational', what Bourriaud described as, 'Parreno invit[ing] a few people to pursue their favourite hobbies on May Day, on a factory assembly line', could, and is actively encouraged, to be considered alongside other works where artists 'exhibit recently robbed safes', or 'put a photograph of labourers at work on view just a few yards from the building site'.¹⁹ In keeping with the attempt to present an idea of 'relational' art, the focus in *Esthétique relationnelle* lay with portraying the potential *relations* that such artworks could facilitate or encourage. Following brief explorations into art of the twentieth century and the various guises and degrees to which 'art has always been relational', Bourriaud provides a glossary of terms used in the essay; with definitions ranging from 'form' and 'image' to 'operational realism' and 'semionaut'.²⁰ As with exhibitions of 'relational' art in the mid-1990s, *Esthétique relationnelle* was largely overlooked. That is, until the text was translated and published into English in 2002 as *Relational Aesthetics*. It was only then that a definition of 'relational aesthetics', identified as an 'aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human

¹⁷ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by Simon Pleasance and FONZA Woods (Dijon: les presses du reel, 2002), pp. 7-8. Parreno's *Werktsche* is the second artwork cited in *Relational Aesthetics*, after Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled (Pad Thai)*, described by Bourriaud as an event where '[the artist] organises a dinner in a collector's home, and leaves him all the ingredients required to make a Thai [sic] soup,' and before Vanessa Beecroft's work where '[the artist] dresses some twenty women in the same way, complete with a red wig, and the visitor merely gets a glimpse of them through the doorway'. See: Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁸ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 43.

¹⁹ Following Parreno's *Werktsche*, some of the other examples mentioned by Bourriaud and cited here include Maurizio Cattelan's *-76.000.000* (1992) and Pierre Huyghe's *Chantier Barbès-Rochechouart [Building Site Barbès-Rochechouart]* (1994). See: Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 7-8.

²⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 15; pp. 107-114.

relations which they represent, produce or prompt,' became a source of debate in Anglophone circles.²¹

The idea of 'relational aesthetics' as a form of theory was one that incited many of the critiques to which *Relational Aesthetics* was subjected. It is this point, too, that has caused subsequent issues in using the term 'relational' to describe artworks themselves.²² What happens, for example, when a 'relational' artist refutes that their work represents, produces or prompts relationships? As Bourriaud notes, 'art has always been relational in varying degrees,' so what *is* it about 'relational aesthetics' that creates 'relational' art?²³ According to Bourriaud, 'relational art' is 'a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space'.²⁴ The nuances of such a statement will be unpicked in the chapters that follow, however, to begin with it is pertinent to pay attention to the wording of this definition of sorts. As with the contestations geared towards *Relational Aesthetics* as a theory, it is the idea of 'relational' artworks taking as 'their theoretical [...] point of departure the whole of human relations' that has been the focus of many Anglophone critiques. This cherry-picking has led to numerous assessments which, as will be discussed, raise eyebrows and interesting questions surrounding the 'theoretical' nature of relationships formed within a sphere of contemporary or 'relational' art. Yet it is *this* cherry-picking, whether deliberate or otherwise, that has also led to a lack of critical attention being paid to the latter parts of Bourriaud's statements. That is to say, there is little research into 'relational art' as 'a set of artistic practices which take as their [...] practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context'.²⁵ As *its* point of departure, then, this thesis focuses on the 'practical point of departure' of *Relational Aesthetics* and the ways in which 'the whole of human relations and their social context' are relevant to interpreting and understanding works of so-called 'relational' art.

Context for a Study

As already mentioned, the idea of studying art in a vacuum as some sort of entity divorced from its environment is only useful to a certain extent. The objective of this thesis is to *reconsider Relational Aesthetics* through considering the pertinence of the social context in

²¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 112.

²² Here, it is important to note that the term 'relational' will be referred to using inverted commas throughout this thesis. This is a deliberate choice to offer a speculative view of 'relational' art by bearing in mind both Bourriaud and other critics' usage of the term 'relational' art and 'relational' aesthetics. The intention here is not to offer a definition of 'relational' art, but instead to reconsider its subsequent interpretation and usage.

²³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 15.

²⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 113.

²⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 113.

which the text and art associated with it emerged. However, the term 'social context' is one that is, in and of itself, too broad. To begin with, where does 'social context' begin and end, not only in terms of time spans, but also in terms of spaces, places and peoples involved with '*l'art relationnel*'? What is perplexing in the pre-existing critiques of *Relational Aesthetics* is a willingness to criticise the idea of 'relational' art without questioning the definition of what it might mean for art to be 'relational' in its original French context. As will be argued, it seems that to be considered under the rubric of *Relational Aesthetics*, art had to be 'relational', not '*relationnel*'. Perhaps herein lies the answer to the question of the 'social context' of this thesis; in order to *reconsider Relational Aesthetics*, it is essential to first contextualise it as *Esthétique relationnelle*. To do this, it is necessary to go back to France in the 1990s to consider the formation of this idea. The confines of this study therefore demand that a focus on the 'social context' of *Relational Aesthetics* is rooted in French society, culture and history. In this sense, then, although being written in English from an Anglophone perspective, this thesis is unapologetically French in its focus. In making this statement, it should be noted that this does not mean that 'French' thought, 'French' art, or 'French' culture are being viewed through *rosé*-tinted glasses, or in isolation from the multitude of influences, peoples and places that have shaped what is understood today as 'France'. In the same vein of this project not offering a clear definition of what 'relational' art might be, nor will it offer a homogeneous or wholly favourable view of what it might mean to *be* 'French'. To attempt to do so in this context would be foolish and, to be honest, is not exactly the sort of project that would appeal to many, including the author. Pursuing an agenda to congratulate and fawn over a country or social context that continues to exploit and misappropriate the cultures and peoples on which it is premised would be an act of injustice. Notions of nationhood and identity are complex, perhaps too complex for a project such as this one but the point being raised here is an acknowledgement of the inherent complexities that are at play in offering a prescriptive approach to 'French' art, 'French' history, 'French' culture, 'French' life and so on. Such a task might be easy if an overabundance of outdated and culturally insensitive stereotypes are used in ways to lazily justify statements being made, however, rest assured, this thesis does not rely on such tactics; there will be no calls for renditions of *La Marseillaise* but readers are welcome to do as they please should the mood take them to such places. Nevertheless, this project, due to its intention of *reconsidering Relational Aesthetics* within its specific socio-historical context, relies heavily on texts written by authors born in France or with French identities, and on artworks created in France, again by artists either born in France or with French citizenship. The decision to do so, however, is not short-sighted and born moreso out of practicality and the need to narrow down the project to have a clear contextual focus. As with any research it is important to recognise the limitations of the project itself and in doing so allowing there to be a clear, justified rationale. In this case, the objective is to *reconsider*

the 'relationality' of *l'art relationnel* in the context in which it was first conceived, a task which has, possibly with good reason, not yet been attempted. Although many of the artists mentioned in *Relational Aesthetics*, and as some might argue, artists who have been 'dogged' with the label of being 'relational' ever since, are not French, through examining the histories of specific schools of French thought relating to community, 'relationality' and strike action, this project illuminates the very 'Frenchness' of 'relational' art as an idea in the first place.

Structure for a Study

In the same way that there are efforts in this thesis to trace particular histories, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the complexities of this A-B-C-D, etc. approach, so too, is there an effort to structure this thesis in a way that *makes sense*, to structure this piece of work in a way that, at the very least, appears cohesive. In structuring this thesis it became apparent that there is no singular, no *correct*, way of exploring ideas and articulating them. For the most part the ideas and claims examined are all *related*, and the artworks cited could all find a home in any one of these discussions. Although it is tempting to structure a project neatly, thinking perhaps of offering a 'tidy' *reconsideration of Relational Aesthetics* that follows the text's claim page by page, or maybe in plotting Bourriaud's moves up until, during and post-*Relational Aesthetics* (indeed, the latter being a structure that is reliant upon presenting a neat history with clear definitions as to what 'pre-relational', 'relational' and 'post-relational' art might look like according to dates, periods and peoples involved), it should be noted that this project is not 'tidy' is adhering to such characteristics. Whilst some of the arguments in individual chapters trace histories chronologically, thinking about how, for example, the *détournement* outlined by the Situationist International in the 1950s has resonance with artworks created almost half a century later, the structure of this thesis is not organised in the same manner. That is to say, then, that this thesis is organised thematically according to the theoretical and socio-historical questions which arise from the texts and pre-existing ideas on which it is premised in four parts, with these four parts focusing on specific elements of *Relational Aesthetics* that seem inherent to its efforts. Part I – 'Contextualising *Relational Aesthetics*' does, as the title suggests, the work of contextualising *Relational Aesthetics*, not only in today's climate, but in the years leading up to, during and following its publication and translation into English. Perhaps this first chapter can be seen to 'set the scene', a chapter whereby readers are provided with the contextual information necessary to understanding the subsequent chapters which question the claims and critiques of *Relational Aesthetics*. Part II – 'When is Art 'Relational'? A Study of the *Objets de grève*' takes as its focus a single artwork, Jean-Luc Moulène's 24, and later 39 *Objets de grève*. The purpose of this chapter is to build on the contextual information provided concerning the political struggles affecting France in the 1990s, so as to understand how such disputes impacted art produced analogously, or as

a product of, these conditions. This chapter questions the exclusivity of 'relational' art, asking the extent to which an artwork that is undoubtedly centred on interhuman relations can be 'relational' even if omitted from Bourriaud's little black book of 'relational' art. Part III – "Relational' Exchange(s)" focuses on Bourriaud's claim that 'relational' art facilitates exchange in an 'interstice', a space exempt from capitalist relations and norms surrounding production and consumption. Paying particular attention to the work of Matthieu Laurette, this chapter considers the feasibility and contradictions of such a claim so as to question whether 'relational' art really *is* based on interhuman relations and if so, at what cost? Finally, Part IV – 'Relational' Time: *Relational Aesthetics* and a case for *contretemps*' puts forth a proposal for *reconsidering* 'relational' art based not on its commitment to facilitating relationships or non-capitalist exchanges, but rather in its interest in questioning temporal formats. Using the concept of *contretemps*, this chapter asks whether 'relational' art is more concerned with questioning time, duration and the influence of capitalism in structuring day-to-day life than in facilitating interhuman relations. What follows, then, are further details about the specific components of this thesis that present a *reconsideration of Relational Aesthetics*.

Part I – Contextualising *Relational Aesthetics*

To begin with, this thesis examines and contextualises the pre-existing critiques of *Esthétique relationnelle*, or, rather, this thesis contextualises the critiques to which the text was subjected after it was translated and published into English as *Relational Aesthetics* in 2002. This, as will become apparent, is a key issue in *reconsidering* how *Relational Aesthetics* has been interpreted and understood in discussions of contemporary art. Although first mentioned in French texts in 1995 and elaborated upon in a longer essay in 1998, art that was described as '*relationnel*' seemed of little interest to Francophone critics at the time of its publication, a relative disinterest that has been maintained until today. However, following the text's translation into English there was a surge in interest not only in *Relational Aesthetics*, but also in 'relational' art. For a term that, today, is used so widely it seems that there is little agreement in its usage and amongst the art that might be considered 'relational'. Here, it is an apt time to highlight the differentiation between *Relational Aesthetics* and 'relational' art that will appear in this thesis; the former being used to refer explicitly to the text written by Bourriaud, and the latter being used with scepticism in discussing concepts and examples of so-called 'relational' art. This distinction is important to note since this thesis does not offer a rigid definition of what may or may not *be* 'relational' art. Previous critiques have attempted to take on such a task and the extent to which this has been effective will be discussed in this thesis.²⁶ But through ignoring the context of *Relational Aesthetics* these critiques often fall into a trap of trying to

²⁶ See: Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (2004), 51-79.

classify certain artworks as one thing or another, which just leads to further confusion and derision of 'relational' art in the first place. In considering the critiques of *Relational Aesthetics* and the subsequent confusion that it caused, there is a possibility of understanding how such a text and artworks associated with it came to be within a very specific moment in recent history. To do this, there will be an analysis of the specific structures in place that permitted exhibitions of 'relational' art to be facilitated in the first instance, alongside localised efforts and initiatives that encouraged the organisation of such exhibitions in galleries across France. Although, as will be discussed, some critics such as Claire Bishop have offered analyses of *Relational Aesthetics* according to specific theoretical contexts or inconsistencies identified, there has been little attention paid to the socio-historical context in which the idea first *emerged*. In order for art to be considered in accordance with the contents of *Relational Aesthetics*, it is therefore necessary to trace its usage and critiques to situate it within the context of art in France in the mid-1990s.

Part II – When is Art 'Relational'? A Study of the *Objets de grève*

Following on from this, this thesis takes somewhat of a *déviaton* from Bourriaud, 'relational' aesthetics and 'relational' art in the second chapter. Here, this chapter begins to question 'relational' art within the context of France in the 1990s by examining a singular artwork: Jean-Luc Moulène's *Documents: 24*, and later 39, *Objets de grève* (1999; 2001) [*Documents: 24*, and later 39 *Strike Objects*]. This artwork, made up of a collection of *objets de grève* [strike objects], collected and photographed by Moulène between the 1970s and 1990s is, as will be argued, a key example of art that is inherently connected to, and a product of, the context in which it was created. In order to argue this point, and to consider this artwork as a representative of the current affairs of France in the mid-1990s, it will be argued that the circumstances in which the *objets de grève* themselves were created are indicative of wider societal, cultural and theoretical movements.²⁷ Paying particular attention to specific examples of the *Documents: 24*, and 39 *Objets de grève*, this chapter seeks to first outline the complexities of the creation of these objects, before considering how the display and subsequent interpretation of them can be understood through an analysis of their relevance to histories of labour activism, strikes and social movements. The purpose of this, then, is to suggest that the *objets de grève* themselves and Moulène's efforts to create *art* from them, are innately 'relational' since they were born of, and continue to be studied, as a result of the interhuman relations that are so central to Bourriaud's notion of 'relational' art. Here, the focus

²⁷ Here, it should be noted that when referring to the artwork *Documents: 24*, or 39 *Objets de grève*, the full titled will be used. When referring to the strike objects themselves (e.g., individual items and wider contexts in which they were created these will be referred to either as '*objets de grève*' or 'strike objects'.

of this chapter is to disrupt the train of thought arising from pre-existing critiques of *Relational Aesthetics*, which generally begin and end with the artists mentioned in Bourriaud's work, so as to further probe the notion of the 'relational art' having a basis in interhuman relations as a 'practical point of departure'. In studying the particularities of some of the individual *objets de grèves* and their relationships to preceding and longstanding schools of thoughts and shared histories, the interconnectedness that is so central to 'relational' art will be highlighted, thus responding to the question 'when is art 'relational'?' Through encountering the various mediums of the *objets de grève* themselves, ranging from boardgames, to counterfeit money, to shoes, and the various contexts in which the *objets de grève* were displayed, in exhibitions at national galleries and former mining sites to printed materials featured in national newspapers and trade union magazines, it will be argued that this artwork can be considered as 'relational'. This is because *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* have an intrinsic dependence on, and potentialities to, create further interhuman relations thus opening new avenues and possibilities for understanding 'relational' art outside of *Relational Aesthetics*.

Part III – 'Relational' Exchange(s)

As already mentioned, albeit briefly, Parreno's *Werktische* is just one example amongst many of artworks made in the 1990s that, as this thesis will argue, offers some sort of consideration of the context in which it was created. In the third chapter of this thesis, the idea of exchange as something inherent to Bourriaud's conception of 'relational' art will be the basis for discussion. The notion of exchange is central to Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, indeed the name 'relational' immediately connotes the various ways in which two or more entities are connected. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud claims that, as a result of 'relational' art being premised on social interactions, it can be seen as giving 'rise to a specific "arena of exchange"'.²⁸ However, the 'arena' of *Relational Aesthetics* is posited as one which permits and facilitates exchanges that are exempt from the day-to-day exchanges that take place under capitalism. Borrowing a term from Marx, Bourriaud argues that the 'relational' exchanges of 'relational' art take place within an 'interstice,' a space in which human relations 'fit more or less harmoniously and openly in the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system'.²⁹ The hesitancy in Bourriaud defining 'the system' to which 'relational' art can exist *outside* of is immediately evident, leading to such a claim becoming the source of critiques to which *Relational Aesthetics* was subjected after its translation into English.³⁰ There is a hesitancy, too, or total lack, on Bourriaud's part to even

²⁸ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 17.

²⁹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 16.

³⁰ See, for example: Stewart Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, 21.4 (2007), 369-386.

analyse how and *if* the social relations which are so vital to ‘relational’ art can exist *hors-réseau* [off-grid]. What is it for ‘relational’ art to *be* in contemporary society, and what exchanges, whether ‘regular’ or within their own specialised ‘specific arena’ can be facilitated if not for the loosely termed ‘system’? Bearing these questions in mind, this chapter examines the nature of the exchanges facilitated during, or as a result of, the encounters enabled by ‘relational’ art. As in previous chapters, this part will seek to expand out of the supposed ‘sphere’ of ‘relational’ art so as to consider alternate artforms and artists, such as Matthieu Laurette, whose work, whilst not strictly ‘relational’ in Bourriaud’s usage of the term, was premised on the ‘other trading possibilities’ outlined in *Relational Aesthetics*. Examining Bourriaud’s discussion of forms and ‘relational’ art’s supposed ‘invention of models of sociability’, this chapter focuses on how and *if* exchange functions within an ‘interstice’, as well as broadening discussions of French art happening away from Bourriaud’s ‘relational’ eye and its efforts to create new forums for exchange both at home and elsewhere.³¹

Part IV – ‘Relational’ Time: Making a Case for *contretemps*

In the final part of this project the focus of discussion shifts. Here, there is an intention to put into practice the title of this thesis, that is to offer a framework for *reconsidering Relational Aesthetics*. Whilst previous chapters question the extent of Bourriaud’s claims, for example, the idea of ‘relational’ art being limited to the artworks cited by Bourriaud, or of ‘relational aesthetics’ taking place in an ‘interstice’ that facilitates free exchange, this chapter builds on the ideas of ‘relational’ art existing in a space that enables the questioning of temporal formats. In order to *reconsider Relational Aesthetics*, this chapter proposes that it is time, not exchange and interhuman relationships, that weaves a common thread through examples of ‘relational’ art and exhibitions premised on ‘relational aesthetics’. This chapter begins by discussing exhibitions in France that preceded ‘Traffic’ and discussions of ‘relational’ art that featured the work of the artists discussed both in this thesis and in *Relational Aesthetics*. Through tracing the curatorial and artistic themes shared between exhibitions including ‘No Man’s Time’ (1991), ‘Le Labyrinthe moral’ [*The Moral Maze*] (1991) and, ultimately, ‘Traffic’ (1996), it will be demonstrated how a shared, and often continuing, interest in how time is experienced in day-to-day life remains a central theme to much of the work that has been described as ‘relational’. Following this, then, it is important to offer a conceptual framework through which so-called ‘relational’ art can be considered as questioning temporal formats and, in some instances, efforts to creating ongoing artistic and curatorial projects. To do this the term *contretemps* will be employed. *Contretemps* has appeared throughout French critical theory in the latter half of the twentieth century, perhaps most notably in Jacques Derrida’s *The*

³¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 27.

Politics of Friendship (1994) and in Daniel Bensaïd's *Marx l'intempestif* (1995), with both theorists considering how the term can be used to describe a pause or the capacity to disrupt prevailing social orders and the temporal formats which govern day-to-day life.³² This term which translates, albeit clumsily, from French as 'against time' will be used to argue that 'relational' art offers a pause, or space for the consideration of alternate forms of temporality, particularly in the examples that will be cited. Relating the concept of *contretemps* to specific examples of artworks, such as Pierre Huyghe's, *L'Association des Temps Libérés* [*The Association of Freed Time*] (1995) which led to the creation of a collaborative, conceptual project with Philippe Parreno, *The House or Home?* (1995), and Huyghe's sculptural installation *Le procès du temps libre, Part I: Indices* [*The Trial of Free Time, Part I: Clues*] (1999), it will be argued that 'relational' art offers a space for dialogue, and the capacity to disrupt pre-established temporal formats, thus opening possibilities for alternate temporalities. It will be argued then, that 'interhuman' relationships, rather than being the basis of 'relational' art, are a necessary component to allow for the questioning and discussion of alternate temporalities. Harking back to previous chapters, too, this section pays close attention to the socio-historical context in which such artworks were created, thinking about how calls for '*les 35 heures*' [the 35 hour working week] in labour activist circles and trade unions could have impacted artworks such as Huyghe and Parreno's. In short, this chapter offers a historical and conceptual analysis of certain examples of so-called 'relational' art with the intention of highlighting how such artworks can be *reconsidered* in light of the context in which they were created.

According to Bourriaud's notes, 'relational' art is an apt space for facilitating relations, since 'art is the place that produces a specific sociability'.³³ However, whilst the 'specific sociability' that 'relational' works produce (or not) has been debated elsewhere according to theoretical nuances relating to exchange and spatial politics, the 'specific sociability' produced by the 'specific context' in which such work was created and organised has not yet been examined. This thesis enters into existing debates with a commitment to offering a social history of 'relational' art, a history which has not yet been put forth by those who have already *considered Relational Aesthetics*. In this respect, then, the proposition of this research is to *reconsider Relational Aesthetics* with this objective at its core. If for Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* is a form of 'aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt,' this project seeks to *reconsider*

³² See: Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (London; New York: Verso, 1994); Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx l'intempestif: Grandeurs et misères d'une aventure critique (XIX-XX siècles)* (Paris: Fayard, 1995). Bensaïd's text was translated into English in 2002 under the title: *Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London; New York: Verso, 2002).

³³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 16.

this definition of sorts. Here, to re-emphasise, the objective of this project is not to *define* or *redefine Relational Aesthetics* or 'relational' art. Throughout the research process the artworks examined help to question whether such works defy definitions of 'relational' art, and the extent to which such 'definitions' are useful, and whether 'relational' art can even be defined in the first place. This thesis considers how such a proposition by Bourriaud came to be within the context of France in the 1990s. Rather than considering *Relational Aesthetics* and 'relational' art as forms of 'aesthetic theory' as outlined by Bourriaud, this thesis inverts and *reconsiders* Bourriaud's 'definition'. To this end then, perhaps it is apt to begin this thesis with an intention to *reconsider Relational Aesthetics* in order to judge specific 'relational' artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations that are represented, produced or prompted by the context in which they were created.

Part I

Contextualising *Relational Aesthetics*

'What makes *Relational Aesthetics* so boring?'³⁴ This is a question asked by the artist and writer Joe Scanlan, in 2005, when considering the proliferation of *Relational Aesthetics* across global, contemporary art. There are no definite answers to this question, but there are many critics that have responded in a similarly scathing manner when asked to review 'relational' art. Despite being described as 'the most influential stylistic strain to emerge in art since the early 70s,' by 2008 – just a decade since the text's publication – exhibitions concerning *Relational Aesthetics* soon came to be seen as 'messy', 'bland', 'trifling' and 'glib'.³⁵ By 2011, a grand total of 15 years after 'Traffic', the art critic Andrew Russeth pondered whether 'it [was] time the rethink the term,' or if 'maybe it [was] time to discard it'.³⁶ 'Relational' art is an interesting phenomenon. Within a decade of first being mentioned, the term *emerged*, circulated widely, reached its peak and then fell out of favour, all in a relatively short time span. This chapter and project more broadly deals with this fall out, questioning, in various ways, whether a reconciliation of sorts with *Relational Aesthetics* is possible. The first option here may involve a period of rehabilitation from which *Relational Aesthetics* emerges, refreshed and renewed, as an unproblematic, clean-cut contribution to recent artistic and theoretical practices. However, to suggest such an outcome is unrealistic; only possible through naïvety or being so completely and utterly enthralled with 'relational' art that its inherent issues remain a closely guarded secret. The second option is to rid *Relational Aesthetics* from memory, burning all evidence of its existence in the process – out of sight, out of mind. For those who have accused *Relational Aesthetics* of 'smack[ing] of repressive peer pressure,' and 'operating through a latent menace of public humiliation,' it is best to ignore its sporadic calls, block its number and simply try to forget it ever happened in the first place.³⁷ The latter of these options is drastic, and efforts to *erase* its traces would inevitably result in future headaches and further fall outs. There is a third option here, though, for those who feel aggrieved by the complexities of *Relational Aesthetics* but remain tempted by its potential. This option requires time and effort in the hope of learning to (re)live with *Relational Aesthetics*. If the second option is followed, this chapter is over before it even began, and more than likely, all because of a

³⁴ Joe Scanlan, 'Traffic Control: Social Space and Relational Aesthetics', *Artforum*, 3 (2005), 123.

³⁵ Jerry Saltz, 'Night at the Museum', in *New York magazine*, 9 November 2008 <<http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/51998/#>> [accessed 13 April 2018]; Roberta Smith, 'Museum as Romantic Comedy', *The New York Times*, 31 October 2008 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/31/arts/design/31gugg.html>> [accessed 12 April 2018].

³⁶ Andrew Russeth, 'The Fall of *Relational Aesthetics*', *Observer*, 15 September 2011 <<https://observer.com/2011/09/the-fall-of-relational-aesthetics/>> [accessed 14 March 2019].

³⁷ Renate Dohmen, 'Towards a Cosmopolitan Criticality? *Relational Aesthetics*, *Rirkrit Tiravanija* and Transnational Encounters with pad Thai', *Open Arts Journal* 1 (2013), 35-46, (p. 39).

misconstrued interaction with 'relational' art. In spite of the widespread fall out with *Relational Aesthetics*, caused, for the most part, by squabbling critics between disciplinary fields, it still remains a topic of debate today. *Relational Aesthetics* is a text that has never really been interpreted as a product of its context, yet persistently marketed as a contemporary tool that encourages the 'resensitising [of] people to their everyday surroundings'.³⁸ In an effort to make amends, this chapter will take the third option, going back to the source materials, listening, and considering the different sides of the story; establishing the necessary basis for reconsidering *Relational Aesthetics*.

The approach taken to this task is derived from the art historian Anthony Downey's assessment of *Relational Aesthetics*. In his article exploring the possible 'politics' of *Relational Aesthetics*, Downey notes that, 'whereas Bourriaud expands his thesis through readings of various artists, I am more concerned here in developing a critical engagement *with* his thesis rather than *passing* critical judgement on his choice of artists'.³⁹ Although specific artworks will be discussed later in this project on account of their potential 'relational' qualities, this chapter focuses on working *with Relational Aesthetics* so as to situate it, 'relational' art and its critiques, within its specific context. There are multiple aspects to examine when undertaking a contextualisation of *Relational Aesthetics*. To begin with, there is a plurality involved in the term itself; under the umbrella term 'relational aesthetics' therein lies the text written by Bourriaud - *Relational Aesthetics*; 'relational' art created by a plethora of figures; in addition to 'relational aesthetics' as a general idea stemming from *Relational Aesthetics* and its associated artworks. All of these factors are important when contextualising this subject, yet, as will soon become clear, these are distinctions which are not always made apparent in critiques of 'relational aesthetics'. There seem to be a few (non-)trends in critiques to which *Relational Aesthetics* has been subjected, with the predominant one being the overarching focus on critiquing Bourriaud's theoretical misgivings in his efforts to devise a 'relational aesthetic'. On this subject, the critic T. J. Demos has remarked: 'The failure to distinguish between Bourriaud's theories and the artistic practices he discussed may [...] risk short-sighted dismissals of the work grouped under the term "relational aesthetics."⁴⁰ This means that the art mentioned in *Relational Aesthetics* tends to be written off as simply 'relational', or used for illustrative purposes in wider, critical engagements, with the 'theoretical bases' present in Bourriaud's text being first in line for critical inquiry. This chapter, then, considers

³⁸ Smith, 'Museum as Romantic Comedy' [accessed 12 April 2018].

³⁹ Anthony Downey, 'Towards a Politics of (Relational) Aesthetics', *Third Text*, 21:3 (2007), 267-275, (p. 275).

⁴⁰ T. J. Demos, 'Dad's Event: Paris, 1921' in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. by Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, et. al. (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 135-155, (p. 152, fn 34).

this phenomenon, one which is very much rooted in Anglophone responses to *Relational Aesthetics*, promulgating it to a place that would have seemed impossible after its initial publication in the 1990s, by bringing together these critiques.

In previous analyses of *Relational Aesthetics* there has been a tendency to present a history of 'relational' art according to a few key dates, with Bourriaud spearheading these demarcations in time; 1996 is generally seen as the 'birth' of *Relational Aesthetics*, when this bouncing bundle of joy (and confusion) entered the world via an exhibition in an old warehouse in Bordeaux; 1998 saw the publication of *Esthétique Relationnelle*; 2002 marks the occasion of the book being translated into English which, arguably, led to *Relational Aesthetics* being understood as the global phenomenon that it is today; and, since then, 'relational' art and 'relational aesthetics' have had an odd omnipresence in debates surrounding contemporary art practices. Of course, there are alternate histories and dates which will be discussed in this chapter, and throughout this thesis, however, this is the most common potted history of 'relational' art presented by critics and theorists alike and provides a simple overview of a history of sorts of *Relational Aesthetics*. To begin with, this chapter first considers *Relational Aesthetics* in its 'inception', focusing on the 'Traffic' exhibition hosted in Bordeaux in 1996, paying particular attention to the continued relevance of this show having taken place in France. Then, this chapter follows the different trails of critiques of *Relational Aesthetics*, with the route including scheduled stops to consider the appearance of the 'social', democracy and conviviality in the text, alongside pit stops that examine the broader disciplinary analysis of the *spatial* aesthetics of 'relational' art. As a disclaimer, these trails more often than not, lead to 'the conceptual cul-de-sacs which Bourriaud's thesis leads us down'.⁴¹ However, advance warning of this perhaps makes the journey appear smoother.

Contextualising 'Traffic'

In 1996, Bourriaud curated 'Traffic' at CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux [CAPC Museum of Contemporary Art, Bordeaux]. 'Traffic' is often considered as the *first* exhibition of 'relational' art. This is unsurprising since CAPC has a reputation of hosting 'exhibitions that have caused real breaks in traditions pertaining to contemporary art'.⁴² The exhibition took place on the ground floor of CAPC in the central nave and adjoining gallery spaces [Fig. 1]. CAPC occupies an expansive former warehouse that was built in 1824. Until the early 1900s, it was a bustling warehouse that catered to river port trading that took place on the nearby embankments of the River Garonne. As trading declined, the building fell into a state of disrepair, before being acquired by the city of Bordeaux in the early 1970s. The warehouse

⁴¹ Downey, p. 275.

⁴² Françoise Taliano-Des Garets, *La Vie Culturelle à Bordeaux 1945-1975* (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1995), p. 245.

was re-opened as a contemporary art museum in 1974, where it 'gradually became the hub where new forms of expression and innovative cultural events all converged.'⁴³ Even before the establishment of CAPC, Bordeaux had a vibrant arts scene, playing host to the annual arts festival SIGMA (1965-1990). Described as 'a melting pot of avant-garde creation across fields,' SIGMA was a space which invited people from all facets of society to participate in and reconsider their interpretations of art in the form of a public arts festival.⁴⁴ It was a space too, which was also associated with developing frameworks of artistic and institutional critique such as those explored further in the writings of art critic and theorist Pierre Restany. Restany was heavily involved with the organisation of SIGMA, convening events and hosting lectures. This is, in part, due to state funding structures in place that support the arts across France. Since the founding of the fifth republic in 1958, there have been increased efforts to decentralise power across the country. This focus on decentralisation reached its peak in the 1980s, following the election of François Mitterrand's Socialist government in 1981. The following year, the *la loi du 2 mars 1982* [the March 2nd 1982 law] was passed which 'created endowed regional councils that could transfer particular acts of governance to regional governments'.⁴⁵ Public spending dedicated to arts and culture increased during the Mitterrand years, 'particularly under former French Minister for Culture, Jack Lang, amid his policy of democratising art in pursuit of fun and the cultivation of all French people's creative and inventive capacities'.⁴⁶ In practice this meant that regional governments were provided with budgets that they could spend according to the demands of their respective areas under the newly formed *Fonds régionaux d'art contemporain* [regional contemporary art fund] (FRAC) system, as well as having access to a wider collection of resources and networks of other cultural institutions for potential collaborations and exchanges.⁴⁷ Similarly, the Fondation de France's *Les Nouveaux Commanditaires* [New Patrons] programme has, since its founding in

⁴³ Romaric Favre, *CAPC Museum of Contemporary Art of Bordeaux: History of the Centre* (Bordeaux: CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux et Imprimerie BM, 2012), p. 9. The conversion of former industrial buildings into cultural spaces was widespread across France, with regional governments repurposing; for example, perhaps the most-well-known of these is the Musée D'Orsay, located in a former railway station in Paris which opened in 1986, La Friche, a former tobacco factory was converted into a museum in 1992, and La Piscine, a former swimming pool turned into an art gallery in Roubaix, in 2000.

⁴⁴ Philippe Cloutet, 'Festival SIGMA de Bordeaux', *Aquitaine Online*, 30 November 2013 <<http://www.aquitaineonline.com/tourisme-sud-ouest/histoire-traditions/festival-sigma-de-bordeaux-1965-1990.html>> [accessed 24 May 2019].

⁴⁵ Patrick Le Galès, 'La décentralisation de la Vème République: héritage départemental versus villes et régions', *Modern & Contemporary France* 16:4 (2008), 451-467, (p. 461).

⁴⁶ Anthony Gardner, 'Aesthetics of Emptiness and Withdrawal: Contemporary European Art and Actually Existing Democratization', *Postcolonial Studies* 13:2 (2010), 179-197, p. 184. See, also: David L. Looseley, *The Politics of Fun: Cultural Policy and Debate in Contemporary France* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), pp. 113-127.

⁴⁷ See: FRAC les collections des fonds régionaux d'art contemporain, *Fonds régionaux d'art contemporain – Qu'est-ce qu'un FRAC?* (2020) <<http://www.lescollectionsdesfrac.fr/index.fr.html>> [accessed 19 May 2020].

1991, supported artistic commissions and projects across France, also extending further afield to provide funding for cultural partnerships with international organisations.⁴⁸ When reflecting on the impacts of decentralisation, Restany stated that ‘we have reached a point where the idea of provinciality, the idea that artists do not have to live in Paris, is no longer ridiculed. To have to be in Paris to be an artist is a lie!’⁴⁹

Here, there is also something to be said about the innate ‘Frenchness’ of *Relational Aesthetics* - about the fact that experimental exhibitions such as ‘Traffic’ could happen in the first place, in Bordeaux and across France. It is not an alien concept, in France, to encourage participation in artistic activities and, as the art historian Anthony Gardner suggests, ‘demands for participation,’ are closely related ‘to the amount of taxpayers’ money pumped into the national promotion of contemporary art’.⁵⁰ There are inherent issues here, though, since the dissemination of funds available often shape the nature of artistic projects. As Gail Day proposes in their study of art and capitalism since 1989, ‘in the museum context, relational practices were often used to meet government-initiated participation agendas’.⁵¹ In the context of ‘relational’ art, which relies on participation and involvement to create *les relations interhumaines* that are so central to Bourriaud’s thesis, this raises questions surrounding the rationale for organising such exhibitions. The French art historian Paul Ardenne has discussed this at length, suggesting that the institutional support afforded to ‘relational’ art, or, ‘contextual’ art to use Ardenne’s terminology (*l’art contextuel*), means that art is often used as ‘a tool for government intervention and initiatives that lead to creating a ‘culture of compensation.’⁵² Or, as writer and artist Walead Beshty has argued, ‘*Relational Aesthetics* is enabled by the continued centrality of the European institution, robust in its state support, and thus able to unproblematically continue as an invisible container for the interaction of ideas’.⁵³

There is the financial, or perhaps ‘practical’ side of things too. There are funds available to support ‘participatory’ art practices so why not spend them? Even if funding systems favour institutions displaying ‘relational’ exhibitions for the sake of bringing people in to improve visitor statistics, this nonetheless still creates spaces for the facilitation of potential interhuman relations. With this comes the social or cultural, and equally ‘practical’, side of things to

⁴⁸ See: François Hers, *Les Nouveaux Commanditaires* (2020) <<http://www.nouveauxcommanditaires.eu/en/22/>> [accessed 17 May 2020]; Didier Debaise, Xavier Douroux, Christian Joschke, et. al., eds., *Faire art comme on fait société* (Dijon: les presses du reel, 2013).

⁴⁹ Nicolas Bourriaud and Pierre Restany, *CAPC Lectures - Le contexte de l’art français*, rec. by Sylvain Mavel (CAPC, Bordeaux: CAPC Bordeaux avec L’École des Beaux-Arts Bordeaux, 2000).

⁵⁰ Gardner, p. 184.

⁵¹ Gail Day, ‘Global Dissensus: Art & Capitalism since 1989’ in *Art & Visual Culture, 1850-2010: Modernity to Globalisation*, ed. by Steve Edwards and Paul Wood (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), pp. 284-315, (p. 295).

⁵² Paul Ardenne, *Un art contextuel: creation artistique en milieu urbain, en situation d’intervention, de participation* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2002), p. 15.

⁵³ Beshty [accessed 17 November 2018].

consider. This pertains to situating *Relational Aesthetics* as representative, prompted by, or reproducing something of the context in which it was created. Bourriaud's usage of the term 'relational aesthetics' first appeared in an article titled 'For a Relational Aesthetic (Part One)', published in the spring 1995 issue of *Documents sur l'art*.⁵⁴ In the months that followed its publication, France experienced the largest wave of strike action since May '68. In May 1995, Republican leader Jacques Chirac was elected President of France, bringing an end to Mitterrand's 14 years as head of state, with Alain Juppé announced as Prime Minister. The Republicans had based their election campaign on building '*La France pour tous*' [France for all] and implementing political reforms that would counteract the waning economy and rising unemployment figures.⁵⁵ However, within weeks of the election, Juppé announced what came to be known as the *Plan Juppé* [Juppé Plan], a series of financial reforms which included tax increases, raising the retirement age and demanding higher contributions to healthcare from those on low incomes.⁵⁶ Or, as philosopher and writer Daniel Bensaïd summarised the Juppé plan, 'the proposals for 1996 are eloquent: wage earners are supposed to provide an extra 40 billion francs to finance the social-security deficit, while companies are only expected to provide five billion'.⁵⁷ Following preliminary union meetings during the summer, between October and December 1995 public sector workers went on strike across France *en masse*. Even though the proposed political reforms targeted public sector workers, the strike was supported across society, with thousands joining protests across France each week before culminating in events that Bensaïd described as 'Red December'.⁵⁸

As one critic wrote in *Les Temps Modernes*, the Juppé Plan had intended to create frictions in French society, pitting the public sector workers against others in an effort to 'condemn the French public to solitude'.⁵⁹ However, it had the opposite effect, building into wider discussions of what Bensaïd described as the 'return to the social'. As Christophe Aguiton and Bensaïd noted, 'after great turbulence during the 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s, those of the liberal counter reform were marked by a negation of the question of the social'.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ *Documents sur l'art* is a contemporary art magazine co-founded by Bourriaud with the curator of Le Consortium, Dijon, Éric Troncy and the artists Philippe Parreno and Liam Gillick in 1992. Here, it is worth noting that 'For a Relational Aesthetic (Part One)' was, in essence, self-published.

⁵⁵ See: Jacques Chirac, *La France pour tous* (Paris: Nil editions, 1994).

⁵⁶ See: Denis Bouget, 'The Juppé Plan and the Future of the French Welfare System', *Journal of European Social Policy* 8:2 (1998), 155-172; Josette Trat, 'Autumn 1995: A Social Storm Blows over France', trans. by Sonya Michel, *Social Politics*, 3:2-3 (1996), 223-236.

⁵⁷ Daniel Bensaïd, 'France: Neo-Liberal Reform and Popular Rebellion', *New Left Review*, 1:215 (1996), 109-116, (p. 110).

⁵⁸ Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times*, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Robert Redecker, 'Décembre 1995: Une grève républicaine', *Les Temps Modernes*, 586:1 (1996), 3-22, (p. 6).

⁶⁰ Christophe Aguiton and Daniel Bensaïd, *Le retour de la question sociale: Le renouveau des mouvements sociaux en France* (Lausanne: Éditions Page deux, 1997), p. 7.

Aguiton and Bensaïd's text offers an analysis of recent social movements by tracing legacies of strike action from the 1960s to *les grandes grèves* of 1995. In their analysis, Aguiton and Bensaïd analyse how the strike action of 1995 'unanimously failed the exam of social movements'.⁶¹ Although support for the general strikes were widespread, with average attendance at protests between 500,000-2 million each weekend, and successful in the sense of the Juppé plan being scrapped, Aguiton and Bensaïd argued that the movement did not have the capacity to radically change society.⁶² This was because of the *engagement* with these issues. As Bensaïd wrote, 'union membership, with around ten percent of employees unionised, is at a low ebb'.⁶³ This is not to assume that because workers were not unionised that they were not *political* or concerned with the issues proposed by the Juppé Plan, rather, that the organisation of resistance relied on the 'militant minority,' rather than an engaged majority.⁶⁴ Although Bensaïd predicted a shift towards reunification in the aftermath of the 1995 strikes, as had happened in the wake of May '68, instead there were fears around historicising events of 1995 in public media, reflecting a growing antipathy or ambivalence towards efforts to alter society from the general public. Bensaïd observed that 'a lot of journalists want to see it [1995] as the last archaic strike of an era which is ending,' before asking, 'Why should it not be the first great anti-neo-liberal strike of the coming century?'⁶⁵ For Aguiton and Bensaïd, *les grandes grèves de 1995* raised questions of how 'the social' could help to enact *real* political change, resulting in a permanent transformation of everyday life. If the social, however, is 'fractured' then theoretical thinking must be combined with acting to reinvigorate the social to create communities able to harness the capacities for potential revolution. This notion of being together is something that has been the heart of much of twentieth century French philosophy, from Sartre's analysis of consciousness in *Being and Nothingness* to the Situationist International's reimagination of the spirit of the Paris Commune. In alignment with thoughts surrounding the isolation invoked by neoliberalism, the protests of 1995 demonstrated the willingness of the public to come together in a shared act of opposition to the prevailing ideologies of the time. In 1986, the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy published *The Inoperative Community*, a study which, using Marx as a basis, examines how the concept of community can be a force for social change and is not confined to rhetoric surrounding utopia in unattainable futures. The act of coming together and cooperating opposes the 'socially imploded characteristic of [the] capitalist community'.⁶⁶ As

⁶¹ Aguiton and Bensaïd, p. 8.

⁶² Aguiton and Bensaïd, p. 213.

⁶³ Bensaïd, 'France: Neo-Liberal Reform and Popular Rebellion', p. 115.

⁶⁴ Bensaïd, 'France: Neo-Liberal Reform and Popular Rebellion', p. 115.

⁶⁵ Bensaïd, 'France: Neo-Liberal Reform and Popular Rebellion', p. 116.

⁶⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 74.

he continues, in contemporary society, 'capital negates community because it places above it the identity and the generality of production and products'.⁶⁷ Nancy argues that, today, society is premised on anonymity which helps to perpetuate uneven social, power and material relations. In spite of living in densely populated towns and cities, Nancy argues that these are spaces 'where more and more different "communities" exist side by side'.⁶⁸ It is this emphasis on living *by* rather than *with* each other that embodies Nancy's theory that the lack of community manifests itself is creating societies that are fractured by solitude, which, on every level impacts the nature of, and possibilities for social relations and the formation of communities. This has wider spatio-temporal consequences, too. In contemporary, anonymous societies, that advocate for the 'individual', ties to communal links become nothing more than a distant memory. As Nancy argues, 'there is no *place*, no site, no temple or alter for community'. This, then, can lead to a longing for community, for *togetherness*, that can be capitalised on in times of political upheaval; such as in Chirac's cries for '*La France pour tous*'.

'Traffic'

So, with the air of social unrest and prolonged strike action still lingering, there was a call to a community of sorts when 'Traffic' opened. The exhibition ran for two months, from 26th January – 31st March, and included the work of 30 artists, most of whom had graduated from art schools in Europe and North America during the late 1980s-early 1990s [Fig. 2]. The exhibition featured a multitude of different mediums and artists offering two different types of interventions; the first interventions were in the nave, arranged to resemble 'a place of exchange and concrete shops, following the model of urban spaces or markets, where visitors would find 'convivial structures and large-scale projects;' the second interventions were located in the adjoining galleries, where visitors would find 'classic exhibition spaces displaying photos, artworks and objects'.⁶⁹ During the first three days of opening (Friday 26th-Sunday 28th January), the artists 'all of whom will be present have organised activities to fill your time, including meetings, events, excursions, etc'.⁷⁰ It was hoped that 'by moving between the exhibition spaces and sharing in the events,' that the audiences would 'get a feeling for the aesthetic project through practical exchanges with the public'.⁷¹ Whilst 'Traffic' would occupy the largest portion of the galleries, it would open alongside an exhibition of Matthew Barney's recent work (*Matthew*

⁶⁷ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 74.

⁶⁸ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 143.

⁶⁹ The press release, circulated to news outlets at the end of 1995, originally stated that the title of the exhibition was: 'Traffic, Pratiques artistiques des années 90' [*Traffic: Artistic Practices of the 1990s*], however, the subtitle was dropped on the invites, exhibition leaflets and accompanying catalogue. Archives de CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 'Traffic' – communiqué de presse, CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (1996).

⁷⁰ Archives de CAPC, 'Traffic' – communiqué de presse.

⁷¹ Archives de CAPC, 'Traffic' – communiqué de presse.

Barney – Installations et vidéos 1990-1995) and *Urgence*, a display of work recently acquired by CAPC, including pieces by Nan Goldin, Noritoshi Hirakawa and Wolfgang Tillmans. Of the three exhibitions, 'Traffic' was, undoubtedly the most expensive with its budget (181,974 FRF) dwarfing the *Matthew Barney* (24,490 FRF) and *Urgence* (1990 FRF).⁷² There were difficulties planning the exhibition as artists were indecisive about their projects; Liam Gillick sent multiple proposals; Gillian Wearing, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Jason Rhoades, Jorge Pardo and Douglas Gordon never responded to requests about arranging travel and accommodation; whilst Maurizio Cattelan sent a handwritten letter about the difficulties he and Philippe Parreno were having getting a box printed, signing off with 'NICOLAS HELP US!'.⁷³ These difficulties extended to the installation of 'Traffic' when projects were overbudget (Cattelan and Parreno), artworks damaged in transit (Parreno), artists were unable to travel (Noritoshi Hirakawa), or they did not want to attend (Gabriel Orozco).⁷⁴ There were also logistical issues, involving manoeuvring and installing the large scale projects in the nave [Fig. 3].⁷⁵ Over the opening weekend a series of events were organised by the artists involved that ran all day; for example, the opening started at 10:00 with a children's' tour of the exhibitions, Pierre Huyghe's *Casting du Sitcom* and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's *Séances au Cabinet Biographique* ran until the early evening, in which time there were also opportunities to attend roundtables with local curators and art critics, watch Matthew Barney's films, before heading outside to listen to Jens Haaning's *Arabic Jokes* as it was broadcast on the streets near CAPC. These events took place across the weekend and included Carsten Höller in conversation with a professor of artificial intelligence, Pierre Huyghe's *Excursion en autobus* which took visitors for an evening bus tour of local industrial areas, and Xavier Veilhan's *Soirée 'Traffic'*, an 'artwork' that involved transforming CAPC into a nightclub and hiring DJs to celebrate the exhibition.⁷⁶

⁷² Archives de CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 'Traffic' – budget, CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (1996).

⁷³ Archives de CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 'Traffic' – proposal de Liam Gillick, CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (1996); Archives de CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 'Traffic' – letter de Maurizio Cattelan, CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (1996).

⁷⁴ Hirakawa was unable to attend after 'having an accident on the New York subway'. See: Archives de CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 'Traffic' – matériaux générales, CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (1996).

⁷⁵ This is with the exceptions of the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan who received no formal art training and worked as a furniture designer before becoming an artist; Noritoshi Kirakawa, an artist who received his education in his native Japan before moving to New York in 1993; Belgian artist Carsten Höller, who originally trained as an agricultural scientist; and, Kenji Yanobe who graduated from Kyoto City University of Arts, Japan, in 1991.

⁷⁶ Archives de CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 'Traffic' – rendez-vous pendant les trois jours de vernissage, CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (1996); Seemingly unrelated to 'Traffic', but perhaps included for the possibility of enticing crowds of local fans to CAPC, were the four concerts arranged for the month of February. Each Wednesday at 18:00, audiences were invited to watch local music acts, ranging from Freaks – proponents of 'dirty and explosive rock' – to Djanghu Ghandal, known to *les Bordelais* for his 'sensual and engaging rap'. See: Archives de CAPC

In the exhibition catalogue, Bourriaud republished 'For a Relational Aesthetic (Part One)' that had appeared in *Documents sur l'art* a year earlier, alongside profiles of each of the artists. The short essay provided the basis for Bourriaud's extended study, *Relational Aesthetics*, two years later so general statements now synonymous with 'relational' art were included; for example, 'the work of art in the 1990s turns the onlooker into a neighbour and interlocutor'.⁷⁷ Bourriaud also referred to these ideas when interviewed by *Sud Ouest*, a regional newspaper distributed in Bordeaux and its surrounding areas. The interviewer asked Bourriaud to clarify 'Traffic's focus on 'human relations', asking whether the exhibition was 'simply just a question of sociology?'⁷⁸ Bourriaud's responses mirror many of the ideas that would later be expanded in *Relational Aesthetics*; 'Traffic' is not a sociological proposition but one that asks you to consider the nature of relations;' the artists were selected because they were part of 'the same generation as Bourriaud' [*comme moi*] and 'were not preoccupied with the name, or signature of artist,' but with 'seeing art through open eyes as 'moments' for interaction'.⁷⁹ Although, Bourriaud also made reference to the recent strikes. He stated that the strikes provided a 'perfect example' or model for visitors to 'Traffic' to see 'people talking with their neighbours [...] and engaging with each other,' which did not appear in his later writings.⁸⁰ Despite making concerted efforts to organise the exhibition, blowing budgets and the making of grandiose claims in the catalogue, 'Traffic' went largely unnoticed, something which belies its prevalence in debates around recent art history.

Any attention that the exhibition received was generally negative. When reviewing the exhibition for *Frieze*, Carl Freedman described Bourriaud's idea of the 'interhuman space of relationality' that could supposedly be facilitated by the artworks on display as 'an unhelpfully vague concept', one which pandered to the 'increasing prevalence of some kind of 'interactivity' in contemporary art'.⁸¹ Such a statement clearly dismissing Bourriaud's call that nothing like 'relational aesthetics' had ever existed before.⁸² Similarly, in a review published in *Zing*, Emily Tsingou described Bourriaud's forms of interactivity as 'not very lucid' and something which 'to the casual visitor of the show seemed a bit confusing'.⁸³ Rather than the atmosphere of conviviality, Tsingou summarised 'Traffic' as bearing 'the characteristics of a

Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 'Traffic' – Concerts, CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (1996).

⁷⁷ Bourriaud, 'An Introduction to Relational Aesthetics', unpaginated.

⁷⁸ Valérie de Saint-Do, 'Traffic' inter-artistes – Entretien avec Nicolas Bourriaud', *Sud Ouest*, 27 January 1996, p. 24.

⁷⁹ de Saint-Do, p. 24.

⁸⁰ de Saint-Do, p. 24.

⁸¹ Carl Freedman, 'Review: 'Traffic'', in *Frieze*, 05 September 1996 <<https://frieze.com/article/tr/article/traffic>> [accessed 16 October 2016].

⁸² Bourriaud, 'For a Relational Aesthetic (Part One)', unpaginated.

⁸³ Emily Tsingou, 'Traffic', in *Zing*, 01 January 1997, <<http://zingmagazine.com/zing3/reviews.html>> [accessed 18 October 2016].

traffic jam: at a standstill and agitated'.⁸⁴ Instead of encouraging an assumed passive audience to interact with the art on display, Bourriaud's exhibition fell short of expectations. Whilst the contents of *Relational Aesthetics* are still ambitious in their aspiration for art of the 1990s, with Bourriaud stating that the art of the period had seemingly surpassed that of previous generations since 'art was intended to prepare and announce a future world,' whereas 'today it is modelling possible universes,'⁸⁵ there are instances where the curator scales back or refines his deliberations of 'relational aesthetics'. For example, Bourriaud's initial and rather general claim for 'relational' art being 'a tool for linking human beings and groups to one another,'⁸⁶ becomes that of relational art being 'a place that produces a specific sociability'.⁸⁷

What is also interesting to note, with the (lack of) attention 'Traffic' garnered is the distinct absences of Francophone literature in discussions of 'Traffic'. The exhibition received minimal coverage in local newspapers, other than *Sud Ouest*, and any substantial analyses came after *Relational Aesthetics* was published in English, in 2002.⁸⁸ This is particularly surprising, then, when taking into account the critiques to which 'relational' art has been subjected, with one critic writing that "'Traffic' and Bourriaud's concept of "relationality" were just too unspecific to be capable of defining a new art', and that some of the 'works were comprehensively stupid'.⁸⁹ The attention that *Relational Aesthetics* has received remains a mystery to the book's author, too, with Bourriaud stating that both the French and English version of the text were largely 'ignored'.⁹⁰ It is odd that the term 'relational aesthetics' has become known as 'a name for what is new about contemporary art, and a key position in debates over art's orientation and value today'.⁹¹ One of the most obvious explanations resides in the coining of the term 'relational aesthetics', a practice that is the result of a wider tendency in art history of subjecting ideas to the status of an '-ism', a status which the philosopher Stewart Martin has argued that *Relational Aesthetics* has succumbed.⁹² This tendency enables artists and artistic styles to be categorised according to their similarities and

⁸⁴ Tsingou, 'Traffic' [accessed 18 October 2016].

⁸⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 13.

⁸⁶ Bourriaud, 'An Introduction to Relational Aesthetics', unpaginated.

⁸⁷ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 16.

⁸⁸ See: Éric Alliez, 'Post-scriptum sur l'esthétique relationnelle: capitalisme, schizophrénie et consensus', *Multitudes*, 3:34 (2008), 121-125; Elisabeth Spettel, 'Esthétique relationnelle: Réorientation du manifeste dans l'art contemporain', *Études littéraires* 44:3 (2013), 47-59.

⁸⁹ Freedman, 'Review: "Traffic"', [accessed 16 October 2016].

⁹⁰ Nicolas Bourriaud in, Tom Morton 'Tate Triennial 2009', in *Frieze*, 01 January 2009 <<https://frieze.com/article/tate-triennial-2009>> [accessed 16 October 2016]. Here, though, it should be noted that Bourriaud's idea of *Relational Aesthetics* being ignored is based on it not being reviewed in art magazines. According to Bourriaud, because of the lack of media coverage, and seeming lack of interest in the text itself, 'people were obliged to go straight to discussing the commentaries on the book,' something that seems to be a bone of contention for Bourriaud, with him stating that this 'allowed some critics with no imagination whatsoever to build their career on'.

⁹¹ Stewart Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', *Third Text*, 21.4 (2007), 369-386, (p. 369).

⁹² Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 369.

organised chronologically so that *the* history of art is seen as a neat, linear narrative, one which suggests a development and progression of styles and techniques from one movement to the next. If this is the case then one might argue that 'relational aesthetics' is a *natural* progression from the ideas of spectacle and participation associated with performance art from the 1960s and 1970s (such the activities of the Moscow-based Collective Actions Group), and emerged at a time following the promulgation of the new generations of artists, as paralleled in the UK with Young British Artists in the 1990s. In this way, 'relational aesthetics' can be considered as a set of artistic practices, upheld by a *theoretical text*, which is a product of the 1990s, and goes some way in encapsulating art forms that was *emerging* from artists who were mostly based in Europe. However, this is not the case. In spite of this absorption into art historical discourse. Bourriaud's brief definition of 'relational aesthetics' as a 'theory', and the critiques which uphold this, have created the conditions in which 'relational aesthetics' (as a conceptual idea), 'relational' art (as manifestations of artistic experiments with social relations) and *Relational Aesthetics* (as a text) are interpreted homogeneously. In the discussion of the critiques which follow, rarely are efforts made to discuss the art mentioned in *Relational Aesthetics*, or the implications of thinking through concept(s) of 'relationality' more broadly.⁹³ The idea of 'relational' art or 'relational aesthetics' as some kind of '-ism' or movement cannot be formed by solely relying on the contents of Bourriaud's book. However, the majority of critiques have taken such a position and take umbrage with (lack of) theoretical underpinnings in *Relational Aesthetics*.

Situating the 'Social' in *Relational Aesthetics*

The focus or 'return' to the social raises questions around its presence in *Relational Aesthetics*. For Bourriaud, 'relational' art is social because it attempts 'to find a coherent position with regard to the current state of production and social relations'.⁹⁴ The difference between the 'social' and 'social relations' is important; in 'relational' practices, the emphasis is on working with, and facilitating social relationships, after 'exploring [what] social bonds have to do with already existing types of relations'.⁹⁵ The 'social', then, is not mutually exclusive with wider notions of 'community', rather, it is seen as something that provides both the basis (conceptually) and the medium (through the devising of artworks) for 'artists proposing as artworks: a) moments of sociability,' and 'b) objects producing sociability'.⁹⁶ Here, the 'social' was thought of as contemporary, with the calls for facilitating sociability stemming from existing debates. When presenting *Relational Aesthetics* too, Bourriaud was

⁹³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 113; See: Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", *October*, 110 (2004), 51-79, p. (58).

⁹⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 46.

⁹⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 46.

⁹⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 33.

eager to assert that it was contemporary, and of the moment. According to Bourriaud, 'relational art is not the revival of any movement, nor is it the comeback of any style. It arises from an observation of the present from a line of thinking about the fate of artistic activity'.⁹⁷ If following this, 'relational aesthetics' and 'relational' art were unprecedented, with no correlations to previous artistic activity – even if artists were using mediums that had been used previously, from installations, to sculptures, to participatory practices, 'relational' art was unheard of, and offered a break, or departure, from the past through its innate contemporariness. Despite making reference to the art of Félix González-Torres as a vague, almost precursor to 'relational' art, Bourriaud constantly emphasises the *now-ness* of 'relational aesthetics'.⁹⁸ When discussing specific examples of his practice, such as *Untitled (Arena)* (1993) – an installation where the artist provided 'a pair of Walkman[s] so that [visitors] could dance under the fairy lights, noiselessly in the middle of the gallery' – Bourriaud describes González-Torres' work as being 'derive[d] from Minimal Art'.⁹⁹ In González-Torres' *Untitled (Arena)*, the audience is offered the opportunity to participate through listening to the music and dancing, thus encouraging 'the "beholder" to take up a position within an arrangement, giving it life, complementing the work, and taking part in the formulation of its meaning'.¹⁰⁰ It seems, then, that with hindsight and 'relational' as a term firmly embedded in art criticism that this artwork could be considered as 'relational'; the installation provided space for two parties to engage with one another through the equipment available in a format similar to those of 'relational' artists that, according to Bourriaud propose moments of 'and 'objects producing sociability'.¹⁰¹ However, Bourriaud refuted this notion, stating that González-Torres' work is 'mistakenly called "*interactive*,'" and finds its origins in Minimalism for its 'phenomenological backdrop [which] speculated on the presence of the viewer as an intrinsic part of the work'.¹⁰² For Bourriaud, González-Torres' work does not *emerge* from 'the social', instead it offers a comparative form to the Minimalist practices of the 1960s. Reading *Untitled (Arena)* according to Walter Benjamin's description of the 'aura', Bourriaud suggests that González-Torres' art can be defined through focusing on the 'inter-subjectivity, in the emotional, behavioural and historical response given by the beholder to the experience proposed'.¹⁰³ For a work like *Untitled (Arena)*, then, it seems as if its premise is determined by

⁹⁷ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 43.

⁹⁸ Bourriaud discusses the recognition of more than one party as essential to González-Torres' work, thus pre-empting *Relational Aesthetics'* focus on creating moments of sociability. As Bourriaud notes: 'From start to finish, González-Torres told the tale not of an individual, bit of a couple, thus cohabitation. [...] The idea of *including the other* is not just a theme. It turns out to be as essential to the formal understanding of the work. See: Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 49-64.

⁹⁹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 59.

¹⁰¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 59.

¹⁰² Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 59.

¹⁰³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 59.

the potential responses that the artwork may elicit, rather than on the artwork itself being considered as a 'space' for potential encounters, or sociability. In Bourriaud's analysis, the emphasis on artworks that hark back to previous movements, such as *Untitled (Arena)*, is placed on the *experience* of, and provoked by, the artwork, whereas 'relational' art focuses on creating the conditions for potential social encounters. Bourriaud attempts to position 'relational' art and 'relational aesthetics' as undoubtedly interested in the 'social' as an abstract entity, rather than as forum(s) for qualitative inquiries into the interactions and experiences of viewers.

Assessing reactions to work like González-Torres' and to 'relational' art more generally is difficult due to their intangible and immeasurable nature. The expectation that artwork will initiate an emotional, behavioural or historical response, and that this may subsequently be condensed into an anecdote cannot be quantified, nor can the 'quality' or number of potential encounters be evaluated in 'relational' practices. Although, presumably, these responses have the capacity to be shared through sociability. Throughout *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud remains steadfast in his focus on art encouraging interhuman relations. The immateriality of the 'social' is not defined in any further detail but Bourriaud also stated that there is materiality in 'relational' art when speaking at the '*Le contexte de l'art français*' ['The Context of French Art'] conference, hosted at CAPC, Bordeaux in 2000. At this event, Bourriaud was in conversation with fellow art critic Pierre Restany, As Bourriaud remarked, 'there is a materiality of sorts in the dialogue and the term 'relational aesthetics'. It's a vehicle, a structure for meeting with others, a new vehicle of design, a new architecture of the public meeting space'.¹⁰⁴ This reiterated his earlier statements in *Relational Aesthetics*, where he had suggested that the tangibility of 'relational' art stems from it acting 'as tools serving to link individuals and human groups together'.¹⁰⁵ If 'relational' art operates as a 'tool', the role(s) of the artist is also key to Bourriaud's thesis. In the efforts to create spaces of potential sociability, Beshty has argued that 'relational aesthetics' relies on artists becoming 'service providers'.¹⁰⁶ This means, that the artists must provide much more than just the basis for 'possible encounters'.¹⁰⁷ Bourriaud attributed this as being a 'phenomenon [with] a sociological explanation, given that the decade that has just gone by'.¹⁰⁸ *Relational Aesthetics*, then, not only aims to encourage sociability but also exists as a *product of the social*, *emerging* in direct response to the changing nature of society. This notion of 'relational' art being shaped by the

¹⁰⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud and Pierre Restany, *CAPC Lectures - Le contexte de l'art français*, rec. by Sylvain Mavel (CAPC, Bordeaux: CAPC Bordeaux avec L'École des Beaux-Arts Bordeaux, 2000).

¹⁰⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 41.

¹⁰⁶ Walead Beshty, 'Neo-Avantgarde and Service Industry: Notes on the Brave New World of Relational Aesthetics,' in *Texte Zur Kunst*, 2 September 2005 <<https://www.textezurkunst.de/59/neoavantgarde-and-service-industry/>> [accessed 17 November 2018].

¹⁰⁷ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 43.

specificity of the 1990s has been acknowledged in Francophone studies. Historian Catherine Duchesneau suggested that 'relational' art is a response to the 'fragmentation of the world, a crisis of the social bond, a general rationalisation of the production process and a rise in power of the State, artistic practices, today, are a field of experimentation of the social bond and the relations of proximity'.¹⁰⁹ In response to questions of the contemporary, Bourriaud argued that 'relational' artists were responding to society of the 1990s, with their responsibilities and *roles* increasingly expanding to encompass ever growing expectations. As Beshty states, 'relational' art is dependent upon the 'the artists' adoption of ruses, operating as curator, interior designer, caterer, public relations manager and event manager'.¹¹⁰ However, the artist-cum-whatever other job(s) that need doing is not a new phenomenon, as discussed by art historian Michael F. Leruth, 'the artist as service provider' is something 'that quite closely characterises Sociological Art'.¹¹¹ It is on this point that 'relational' practices have been critiqued in Francophone circles, rather than on the text itself or of the exhibitions of such art. Whilst Anglophone critics directed their attention towards *Relational Aesthetics'* theoretical capacities, or lack thereof, Francophone critics focused, instead, on the supposed 'founding' of 'relational' art by Bourriaud in the 1990s. In Bourriaud's text, citations to pre-*Relational Aesthetics* are plentiful. Yet, these earlier practices are not presented in a way to suggest a linearity that somehow led to 'relational' art's arrival. Bourriaud maintains that 'relational' art was a response to its contemporary environment, rather than an art form that was in a constant state of development before being revealed – *et voilà* – in the 1990s. To repeat a previous reference, 'relational art is not the revival of any movement, nor is it the comeback of any style'.¹¹² *Relational Aesthetics* is often included in studies as marking 'the social turn' in art, that has since become so synonymous with artistic practices of the 1990s.¹¹³

However, this a claim that has been challenged by Francophone critics and practitioners. In his study of Fred Forest, a French multimedia artist and co-founder of the Collectif d'art sociologique [Sociological Art Collective], Leruth contests the 1990s as the decade of *Relational Aesthetics*. As Leruth argues, 'the relational and intersubjective approach to art was developed by Forest over twenty years before Nicolas Bourriaud popularised the

¹⁰⁹ Catherine Duchesneau, 'De la participation en art. L'Écomusée du fier monde comme alliance entre l'art et la participation citoyenne,' in *Émulations no. 9: Art, participation et démocratie*, ed. by Delphine Masset (Louvain: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2011), pp. 57-68, (p. 59).

¹¹⁰ Beshty, [accessed 17 November 2018].

¹¹¹ Michael F. Leruth, *Fred Forest's Utopia: Media Art and Activism* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2017), p. 86.

¹¹² Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 43.

¹¹³ See, for example: Lars Bang Larsen, 'The Long Nineties', in *Frieze*, 01 January 2012 <<https://frieze.com/article/long-nineties>> [accessed 16 October 2019]; and, Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Dictatorship* (London; New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 11-40.

idea of “relational aesthetics”¹¹⁴ Forest, along with fellow artists Hervé Fischer and Jean-Paul Thenot founded the Collectif d’art sociologique in the early 1970s. The collective were influenced by ‘new sociology’, a term applied to the surge in interest and scope of the field of sociology increasing in France during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s this critique and demand for the expansion of sociology as a discipline was, as art historian Lily Woodruff has argued, largely due to figures such as Henri Lefebvre, Alain Tourain and Michel Crozier and their students at Paris Nanterre University, who ‘were dissatisfied with the way that sociology was taught in the university’.¹¹⁵ Basing some of their experiments on the writings of the Situationist International, in 1976 the Collectif d’art sociologique published ‘Manifesto 3’ in which they stated that their intentions were to ‘make the reality of social relations appear concretely’.¹¹⁶ The collective used the changing attitudes towards sociology as a central component of their artistic practice to challenge what they described as the obscuring of social relations by ‘the dominant ideology’.¹¹⁷ In 1977, Forest wrote a text outlining that Leruth has subsequently described as ‘the original relational aesthetic’.¹¹⁸ According to Forest,

Breaking with most of the movements that preceded it [Sociological Art’s] goal is not the production of images or textual imagery, *but the establishment of systems of relations. Systems of relations that consist in experimenting with utopian models [...] superimposed on concrete social relations.* It is society itself in the form of everyday life that constitutes its research laboratory its preferred field of investigation. Hence, the ‘works’ create so not involved concrete ‘art’ objects, but emergent inter-relational processes.¹¹⁹

Reading this text, from a perspective which recognises the impact of *Relational Aesthetics*, and has lived through its omnipresence in debates of contemporary art forms, it seems somewhat surprising that Forest’s writing, along with that of others in the Collectif d’art sociologique are not mentioned by Bourriaud. Even in his interaction with Restany, a key proponent of ‘sociological art’ who invited the Collectif d’art sociologique to represent France at the 1976 Venice Biennale, references to their work remain absent in Bourriaud’s accounts of ‘relational aesthetics’. Yet, the parallels between ‘sociological’ and ‘relational art’ are clear;

¹¹⁴ Leruth, p. 82. Here, it should be noted that ‘sociological’ art is also privy to similar contestations around its founding. As Leruth notes, ‘The origins and subsequent development of Sociological Art are still a matter of some dispute. [...] There is also disagreement over who first came up with the term itself: Fischer, Forest, Pluchart and Flusser each claim that they were the first to use it in reference to a movement or specific methodology. Both Pluchart and Pierre Restany used the term in the late 1960s. However, one thing is clear: although the founding members of the [Collectif d’art sociologique] made themselves the public face of Sociological Art, the countours of the movement were somewhat broader’. See: Leruth, p. 207, fn 26.

¹¹⁵ Lily Woodruff, *Disordering the Establishment: Participatory Art and Institutional Critique in France, 1958-1981* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 198.

¹¹⁶ Hervé Fischer, Fred Forest and Jean-Paul Thénot, ‘Manifesto 3’ in *Théorie de l’art sociologique*, ed. by Hervé Fischer (Tournai: Casterman, 1977), p. 34.

¹¹⁷ Fischer, p. 34.

¹¹⁸ Leruth, p. 82.

¹¹⁹ Fred Forest (1977) quoted in Leruth, p. 82.

the objective of both is to consider social relations – ‘sociological’ art aspires to ‘establish’ systems of social relations; ‘relational’ art seeks to create the conditions in which social relations other than those experienced under capitalism can be facilitated. ‘Sociological’ art draws its influences from the everyday; ‘relational’ art ‘does not transcend everyday preoccupations,’ rather, ‘it confronts us with reality by the way of the remarkable nature of any relationships to the world’.¹²⁰ However, there are also distinct differences between the two: ‘sociological’ art consists of ‘experimenting with utopian models,’ whereas, for Bourriaud, the role of ‘relational’ art no longer relies on forming ‘imaginary and utopian realities,’ and is instead presented as a project that can ‘actually be ways of living and models of action with the existing real’.¹²¹ Similarly, Bourriaud’s insistence that ‘relational’ art is unparalleled in art history differs from Forest’s approach, which recognises ‘sociological’ art as a break with ‘most movements that preceded it’.¹²² Forest’s conception of ‘sociological’ art, speaks to previous participatory or *social* art practices, such as those carried out by the Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel [Visual Art Research Group] (GRAV). GRAV was an art collective founded in Paris in the 1960s which operated until 1968. For GRAV, there was an objective to establish ‘new means of public contact with the works produced’.¹²³ GRAV are said to ‘have participated in the period shift from phenomenological investigations of individual experience,’ such as the Minimalism that Bourriaud has argued as being central to González-Torres’ practice, thus making it distinct from ‘relational’ art, ‘to structural critiques of cultural and social power’.¹²⁴ As art historian Lily Woodruff has written, in her study of French post-war participatory art, ‘by inventing new opportunities for encounters among their audience-participants,’ both GRAV and the Collectif d’art sociologique, ‘hoped to change the facts themselves and thereby create social change beyond the art world’.¹²⁵ In spite of Bourriaud’s contestations, there are traces of GRAV in *Relational Aesthetics*. When Bourriaud discusses ‘relational’ art as unlike anything that has existed before, this speaks to GRAV’s disdain for historical referencing, a practice which they felt was steeped in elitism and since it ‘would only be understood by a spectator who had privileged access to an intellectual interpretive apparatus external to the art object’.¹²⁶ These connections between artistic practices as those of GRAV and the Collectif d’art sociologique have also been traced by the French artist Pascale Weber. In her article, ‘*Politique de l’art relationnel*’ Weber notes that *Relational Aesthetics*, ‘in effect,’ attempts to

¹²⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 57.

¹²¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 13.

¹²² Forest (1977) quoted in Leruth, p. 82. [emphasis author’s own].

¹²³ GRAV, ‘Propositions générales du GRAV’, 25 October 1961, signed by Rossi, Le Parc, Morellet, Sobrino, Stein and Yvaral, reproduced in Luciano Caramel, ed., *Groupe de recherché d’art visuel 1960-1968* (Milan: Electa, 1975), p. 25, author’s translation.

¹²⁴ Woodruff, p. 31.

¹²⁵ Woodruff, p. 198.

¹²⁶ Woodruff, p. 36.

'break with artistic expressions of the 1970s that are detainable to a restricted public of privileges, the elite'.¹²⁷ Although *Relational Aesthetics* and its focus on representing, producing or prompting *les relations interhumaines* are presented as contemporary, and *original*, Bourriaud's proposal of an art premised on the 'social' speaks to preceding artistic practices, both in France and elsewhere.

The 'social' in its various forms in *Relational Aesthetics* is not to be confused with *l'art engagé* [socially engaged art]. Like with 'relational' art, socially engaged practices can be difficult to define, though the term 'social' 'helps locate this practice in an experiential and intellectual realm that also includes social studies, social work, and social housing'.¹²⁸ Grant Kester, an art historian specialising in 'activist' and 'community' art finds the 'social' in *Relational Aesthetics* ambiguous, resulting in it 'being difficult to determine what, precisely, constitutes the aesthetic content of a given relational work'.¹²⁹ For Kester, 'relational' art as a socially engaged practice is 'ominous', since it 'relies on a dated caricature of activist art (as co-extensive with the worst traditions of agitprop) to legitimise the work he endorses'.¹³⁰ For Kester, for art to be socially engaged implies that it is contributing towards social change, in some degree. Socially engaged art, therefore, tends to be discussed as a 'political' project, one that is often present in debates surrounding 'activist' art. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud makes vague allusions towards the supposedly political nature of 'relational' art, as he argues, 'contemporary art is definitely developing a political project when it endeavours to move into the relational realm by turning it into an issue'.¹³¹ However, does relying on 'social relations' in 'relational' art really highlight the inherent issues at play in interactions? This idea of 'socially engaged' art is invariably known in other formats such as 'participatory art,' 'community art', 'activist art', and, in Francophone critiques as '*l'art contextuel*' ['contextual art']. According to art historian Paul Ardenne, contextual art 'emerged out of the participative arts of the 1950s and 1960s in France,' and has the potential today to 'multiply democracy'.¹³² 'Contextual' art, like 'relational', 'social', 'community', 'activist' and other art forms that involve a certain degree of involvement, or participation, or the creating of environments for potential encounters have been discussed in terms of democracy. Here, questions can be asked about access to such artworks that intend to elicit, or rely upon social relations and the extent to which 'democratic' participation in such artworks can result in 'democratic' relations. Although,

¹²⁷ Pascale Weber, '*Politique de l'art relationnel*', *Turbulences vidéo* 44 (2004), 69-73, (p. 69).

¹²⁸ Tom Finkenpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham, NC: London: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 5-6.

¹²⁹ Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 30.

¹³⁰ Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, p.59.

¹³¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 17.

¹³² Here, Ardenne outlines several characteristics for *l'art contextuel*. See: Paul Ardenne, *Un art contextuel: création artistique en milieu urbain, en situation d'intervention, de participation* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2002), pp. 4-38, (p. 38).

it can be said that the tendency to focus on the 'relationality' of an artwork, thinking of what it might *do*, or how it might *function*, and the potential *results* of its efforts to facilitate interactional exchanges, can lead to overlooking 'relational' art, as art in and of itself. As T. J. Demos writes: 'This one-sidedness has similarly become an emerging problem with activist-inspired practice that discounts all aesthetic criteria, rejecting as irrelevant the consideration of how visible forms might advance social and political objectives'.¹³³ Writing in 2012, Bishop argued, even a decade after *Relational Aesthetics*' first appearance in English, that 'the 'social' therefore holds myriad connotation at this moment: dialogue, collaboration, process, diversified audiences, democratic participation – with the spectre of socialism as a political analogue for all of this hovering uncertainly in the background'.¹³⁴

(Un)Democratic Relations

In considering the work of 'relational' art and 'relational aesthetics', Bourriaud makes the following observation: 'What strikes us in the work of this generation of artists is, first and foremost, the *democratic* concern that informs it'.¹³⁵ The 'democracy' of 'relational' art can be considered across spaces, from theoretical concerns to the nature of engagement with such artworks, and the role of the artist. One of the predominant critiques to which *Relational Aesthetics* was subjected following its translation into English, was for its treatment, or rather lack of substantial treatment, of the question of democracy, with critics such as Claire Bishop, T. J. Demos and Walead Beshty, amongst others, writing on this subject. For these critics, there is a general consensus that *Relational Aesthetics* assumes that there is a form of egalitarian democracy that is standardised and present in settings where relational art is exhibited. Bourriaud does not directly address this in his text, instead making generalisations about 'relational' art's 'proposal[s] to live in a shared world'.¹³⁶ Within Bourriaud's statements, however, there is a distinct absence of considering how 'relational' art might operate according to hierarchies and customs that are present in everyday social relations. After attending multiple exhibitions of 'relational' art, the artist Joe Scanlan reviewed his experiences in *Artforum*, recalling that 'indeed, firsthand experience has convinced me that relational aesthetics has more to do with peer pressure than collective egalitarianism'.¹³⁷ Bourriaud also makes questionable statements about the democracy of 'relational' artists, stating that 'the artist sets his sights more and more clearly on the relations that his work will

¹³³ T. J. Demos, 'Dad's Event: Paris, 1921' in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. by Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, et. al. (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 135-152, (p. 1450).

¹³⁴ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Dictatorship* (London; New York: Verso, 2012), p. 206.

¹³⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 57.

¹³⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 22.

¹³⁷ Scanlan, 'Social Space and Relational Aesthetics', p. 123.

create among his public'.¹³⁸ Again, there is no mention of the power relations involved in these scenarios. The positioning of Bourriaud's statement implies an authorial mark of the artist, with no mention of co-creation with viewers, those involved in populating their propositions with interactions. As already mentioned, the idea of the 'relational' artist as adopting more roles (of the artist as artist, curator, designer, docent, and so on) is central to Bourriaud's premise, with the curators defending this notion in the name of 'democracy'. But, as Beshty asks 'democratic for whom?'¹³⁹ In Bourriaud's conception of the artist as capable of fulfilling roles that span institutional and knowledge sectors, there is seems to be a belief that more really is more. Although attempting to create an environment that focuses on inciting spaces for *possible equal* relations, the expansion of the *roles* renders the responsibility for creating these spaces with the artists, rather than with those (the viewers, or participants) supposedly interacting with them. As Beshty continues, 'while these are open new territories for artists, it would be deeply problematic to assume these mean more ethical, or valuable contexts for viewers to interact'.¹⁴⁰ This is a point which the art historian Claire Bishop raises in an article 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' which was published in *October* in 2004, two years after *Relational Aesthetics* had been translated into English. In her article, Bishop calls Bourriaud's assumption of the collective experience of relational art into question, arguing that viewers are often 'envisaged as a community,' with the artwork on display supposedly giving the audience 'the wherewithal to create a community, however temporary or utopian this may be'.¹⁴¹ In a subsequent text on participation and the spectacle, Bishop focuses on this relationship between the supposed communities comprised of the audience for such artwork and their relation(s) with the artist(s). Although the artist is necessary to create the spaces for these possible 'participatory' or 'relational' practices, as Bishop argues, 'The artist relies upon the participants' creative exploitation of the situation that he/she offers, just as participants require the artist's cue and direction'.¹⁴² These relations, which are embedded in the social and ideological formations of spaces and power, according to Bishop, can form 'a relationship that is a continual play of mutual tension, recognition and dependency – more akin to the collectively negotiated dynamic of stand-up comedy, or to BDSM sex, than to a ladder of progressively more virtuous political forms'.¹⁴³ Bourriaud's approach relies on a definition of 'the social' as a totality; in thinking about potential relations that art might facilitate, there is a focus on the social as a collective, as an *all*. This, it can be argued, is inherently undemocratic

¹³⁸ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 28.

¹³⁹ Beshty [accessed 17 November 2018].

¹⁴⁰ Beshty [accessed 17 November 2018].

¹⁴¹ Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (2004), 51-79, (p. 54).

¹⁴² Claire Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?' in *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, ed. by Nato Thompson (New York: Creative Time; Cambridge, MA.; London: MIT Press, 2012), pp. 34-45, (p. 41).

¹⁴³ Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?', p. 41.

for its homogenisation of experience fails to acknowledge the debates surrounding the democracy of space, whether that be public or private, and its impact on viewers of relational art. Or as Beshty argues, 'relational' art and 'relational aesthetics' run the risk of transforming the communal into the estranged'.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Bourriaud's approach ignores the subjectivity of individual experience and, as Scanlan notes, spaces of 'relational' art where relationships are formed out of obligation rather than choice.

Whilst Bourriaud's work contains ideas that are susceptible to critique, so too does Bishop's. Throughout the narratives and studies that have stemmed from contextualising and theorising *Relational Aesthetics*, Bishop's work has, generally, been viewed more favourably than Bourriaud's. But, *Relational Aesthetics*, for all its focus on promoting *les relations interhumaines*, is not a popularity contest. For example, in Bishop's work there is an explicit focus on critiquing the lack of politics in *Relational Aesthetics*, in assessing its failure to become 'a more embedded and socially/politically aware mode of artistic practice'.¹⁴⁵ Yet, in Bishop's writing there is an ever-present dogmatism, a constant sense of asserting the innate contradictions of *Relational Aesthetics* whilst being unaware of her own work veering in a similar direction. For example, it is clear that *Relational Aesthetics* does not offer a sufficient theoretical account of the relations necessary to the encounters promised by 'relational' art, but Bishop's work falls victim to this too, albeit through attempting to present a hierarchy of 'relational' and 'social art practices. This is most noticeable in 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'. In this article, Bishop analyses the work of Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra, two artists not mentioned in *Relational Aesthetics*, against two 'relational' artists, Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija. Throughout the article, Bishop attempts to *prove* that Hirschhorn and Sierra are 'better' artists, more 'social', more 'participatory', and concerned with 'better' politics, without ever providing *evidence* of such claims.¹⁴⁶ At first glance, Bishop's claims allude to Hirschhorn and Sierra as 'better' artists because they *engage* more *directly* with Bishop's own idea of politics. To a certain extent, Bishop's claim is valid given that Sierra's work often features those who Bishop may identify as 'repressed', such as undocumented workers and others who face the harshest critiques from state powers. As Bishop notes, Sierra's work and the issues that it attempts to expose are a far cry from Bourriaud's claim of relational art as a convivial experience. In her analysis, Bishop favours the work of Sierra over that of Gillick and Tiravanija, for its explicit 'reflection on Marx's theory of the exchange value of labour,' similarly Hirschhorn's work is considered to be a prime example of relational art for its supposed ability to 'demonstrate better democracy'.¹⁴⁷ But, here, Bishop's work is

¹⁴⁴ Beshty [accessed 17 November 2018].

¹⁴⁵ Bishop, p. 216.

¹⁴⁶ Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', p. 79.

¹⁴⁷ Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', p. 77.

problematic because it does not account for the theoretical interventions that have influenced the work of the artists mentioned by Bourriaud. Although Bishop's critiques of *Relational Aesthetics* often focus on the collapsing of possibilities for individual or subjective experiences through the homogenisation of 'the social', her work does the same in relation to the artists involved. Gillick challenged these claims, arguing that Bishop frequently misreads the theorists that she quotes.¹⁴⁸ Maybe this is a case of an artist throwing their toys out the pram; Gillick responds to Bishop in a fashion that is confrontational, offering a similarly scathing critique of her work as she does his – maybe, then, the two are even, having hashed out their differences in the pages of *October*. However, Gillick substantiates his points. Whilst acknowledging that *Relational Aesthetics* contains 'major contradictions', Gillick also refutes Bishop's suggestion that his work, and that of other artists associated with *Relational Aesthetics*, is based on assuming that dialogue is inherently democratic, proposing, instead, that in reading Bishop's essay that 'we are forced to sit through an explanation of why [their work] wouldn't be good enough if [such a statement] were true'.¹⁴⁹ It is here that Bishop seems to become a victim of her own critique by seeking to understand 'relational aesthetics' as some form of collective identity and project, as if all the artists involved had an equal interest in being perceived as some form of group, and she seems to conveniently forget about the individual and subjective influences, experiences and concerns of artists who Bourriaud was working with in the 1990s. Although at times 'below the belt', it is difficult to disagree with Gillick's assessment of Bishop's critique descending into 'an unfortunate tag-team face-off'.¹⁵⁰ A tag-team face-off in which the artists mentioned are unwittingly pitted against one another in the names of highlighting the failures of 'relational' art (with Gillick and Tiravanija firmly situated on Team Bourriaud), and the 'successes' of Hirschhorn and Sierra's 'participatory' practices (Team Bishop). The effect of such an exchange renders the text as some form of trivial point-scoring exercise in which Bishop constantly vies for the approval and validation that the artists at the basis of her work, are more *deserving*, of attention, or, to use her vocabulary, are simply 'better artists' overall. In spite of the proverbial tête-à-tête being rooted in a Bishop vs. Bourriaud showdown, it is

¹⁴⁸ Here, Gillick critiques Bishop's readings of Hal Foster and Chantal Mouffe. See: Liam Gillick, 'Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"', *October*, 115 (2006), 95-107, (p. 96; p. 105).

¹⁴⁹ Gillick, 'Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"', p. 96; p. 105.

¹⁵⁰ Gillick, 'Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"', p. 97. For example, Gillick references Bishop's writing from when she was working as a journalist for the *Evening Standard*. He explains how the *Evening Standard's* parent company, Associated Newspapers Limited, owns newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, which in Gillick's words has been 'a staunch bastion against the processes of critique and progress'. Using the conservative, 'pro-Apartheid, pro-Thatcher, and anti-Union' position of Associated Newspapers Limited, Gillick attempts to destabilise and questioning Bishop's authority in offering an objective view of 'political' art objects. See: Liam Gillick, 'Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"', p. 95, fn 1.

interesting to note that the latter, the instigator of such a debate in the first place, has remained silent on the matter.¹⁵¹

(Un)Happy Relations

Another of the contentions that Anglophone critics have lobbied at *Relational Aesthetics* is its focus on positivity. When describing 'relational' art, Bourriaud has assumed that it creates 'places of conviviality,' places which are facilitated by 'meetings, encounters, events, various types of collaboration between people, games, [and] festivals'.¹⁵² To use the term 'conviviality' implies that 'relational' art creates welcoming spaces in which audiences feel 'at home' and able to initiate the interhuman relations on which the art they are engaging with is premised. Bishop's contestations with *Relational Aesthetics* stem from subjecting his work to ideas outlined by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in the 1980s. Bishop utilises Laclau and Mouffe's idea of 'antagonism' to critique Bourriaud's assumption of relational art as a sphere for democratic interaction. Using Laclau and Mouffe's argument that politics should not be enacted as an 'essence of the social,' Bishop claims that the artworks and artists selected by Bourriaud for their 'relational aesthetic' fall short because of their inability to offer the opportunity for the audience to actually experience anything of any substance.¹⁵³ Or rather, as Bishop argues, in *Relational Aesthetics* 'all relations that permit "dialogue" are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good'.¹⁵⁴ Referring to the work of Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Philippe Parreno, all of whom feature throughout *Relational Aesthetics* and in preceding and subsequent exhibitions curated by Bourriaud, Bishop argues that their practices are devoid of the possibility for any 'real activity,' since 'the viewer is offered a fictional role'.¹⁵⁵ Whilst the distinction between the 'fictional' work of Bourriaud's artists and the 'real' work that Bishop chooses to study is not clear, it seems that her issue with the artists mentioned in *Relational Aesthetics* is the 'cosy situation' which she sees them as occupying, one which is not sustainable or of any interest to political and social

¹⁵¹ It should be noted that Bourriaud and Bishop were both speakers at 'The Art of the Encounter' conference hosted at the Whitechapel Gallery London which took place on 22nd May 2004. Since her article in *October*, Bishop has gone on to publish extensively on the topic of participation in contemporary art, including editing a volume on the subject for the Whitechapel Gallery's *Documents of Contemporary Art* series and in 2012 released *Artificial Hells*, a text which attempts to chart the history of participatory, not relational, art practices.

¹⁵² Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 28. The notion of conviviality has been critiqued for its references to the conditions of a comfortable and jovial atmosphere typically enjoyed when sharing a meal, an atmosphere which, rather than relating to the work of all of the artists mentioned in *Relational Aesthetics*, seems to align most closely with the practice of Rirkrit Tiravanija.

¹⁵³ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 193.

¹⁵⁴ Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', p. 65.

¹⁵⁵ Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', p. 61, fn 26.

development, since such work is 'predicated on social harmony'.¹⁵⁶ For Bishop, art based on some form of 'relational' exchange is not predetermined by a commitment to positivity. In the same vein that Bourriaud fails to examine the power relations innate in *les relations interhumaines*, so too does he ignore the individuality, and context, of experience. In (not) doing so, Bourriaud collapses the convivial into a homogenous entity. Through this focus on conviviality, a purpose of 'relational' art as performing a public, or 'social' good is posited. But, as discussed, the 'social' of *Relational Aesthetics* is complicated and cannot be equated with the positivity implied by other terms such as 'community', 'togetherness' and used in conjunction with conviviality. As Beech argues, one of the inherent issues in the positivity implied in Bourriaud's 'theory' is that 'the preconditions for a collective, reflective, decentred and cordial exchange are not universal and already in place'.¹⁵⁷ The lack of interest in the subjectivity of experience, or of the 'emotional' or 'historical' responses to artworks that Bourriaud had discussed as central to practices such as González-Torres', rendered *Relational Aesthetics* numbing, and potentially inaccessible, for some. In certain artworks, too, this evening out of experience, and focus on the positivity of 'relational' art can, as art historian and curator Miwon Kwon, has argued, lead to artists 'inadvertently aid[ing] in the colonisation of difference,' resulting in 'their becoming both subject and coproducer of their own self-appropriation in the name of self-affirmation'.¹⁵⁸ As Scanlan noted, 'for all relational aesthetics' claims to utopia and tomorrow being another fine day, an aesthetic that can't allow anything bad to happen sounds more like anaesthesia to me'.¹⁵⁹

Perhaps there is a case of *convivialité* being lost in translation. In French, '*convivialité*' has a similar meaning to the English definition; a term that refers to the quality of being friendly, lively and making people feel welcome. However, in French *convivialité* has another meaning, that of 'user-friendliness'.¹⁶⁰ It is the former definition of *convivialité* that has been most critiqued in Anglophone circles, for its overtly positive connotations and the contradictions of 'relational' art creating welcoming spaces in environments that are structurally discriminatory. However, considering 'relational aesthetics' and 'relational' art for its 'user-friendliness' helps to further contextualise the ideas as products of the 1990s. Indeed, in the press release for 'Traffic', there are explicit references to 'the creation of spheres of user-friendliness' [*'installation di lieux de convivialité*].¹⁶¹ As Bourriaud argues, 'the emergence of new

¹⁵⁶ Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', p. 79. Here, perhaps it can be suggested that Bishop ascribes the 'fictional' description to the conviviality and positivity of social exchanges assumed by Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics*.

¹⁵⁷ Beech, 'The Art of the Encounter [Report]', p. 46.

¹⁵⁸ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 139.

¹⁵⁹ Scanlan, 'Social Space and Relational Aesthetics', p. 123.

¹⁶⁰ *Convivialité* can be used as a synonym for the more commonly used *facilité* which refers to the easiness or the ease with which a task might be completed.

¹⁶¹ Archives de CAPC, 'Traffic' – communiqué de presse.

technologies, like the internet and multimedia systems, points to a collective desire to create new areas of conviviality'.¹⁶² Not only was Bourriaud pre-empting spaces of sociability that new media would create, such as social networking sites, but also the ease with which sociability, in these contexts, could be enacted. In discussing the plurality of mediums of 'relational' art, Bourriaud notes that the interactions facilitated by such work can go 'beyond the inevitability of families, ghettos of technological user-friendliness, and collective institutions on offer'.¹⁶³ In which case, perhaps like the plurality of 'relational' forms and projects, so too, are there multiple forms of conviviality. Similarly, Bourriaud's assumption of conviviality ignores the subjectivity of the viewers' or participants' experience, with him assuming that the social exchanges supposedly facilitated by relational art result in an enjoyable encounter for all those involved, implying to a certain extent, that relational art elicits some form of uniform, regularised response from its audience. What Bourriaud fails to take into account are the experiences of those who are perhaps more sceptical or cynical of such a proposition: as Hal Foster argued, when it comes to exhibitions of relational art 'this is where I side with Sartre on a bad day: at least in galleries and museums, hell is other people'.¹⁶⁴

Institutional Relations

When discussing 'relational' practices, Bourriaud mentions the 'free areas' created in contemporary art exhibitions, which supposedly 'differs from the "communication zones" that are imposed upon us'.¹⁶⁵ *Relational Aesthetics* is premised on the notion that everyday life encroaches on social relations. As Bourriaud notes, 'the general mechanisation of social functions gradually reduces the relational space'.¹⁶⁶ Here, there are two points to be noted, firstly, there is the 'general mechanisation' of the everyday in which social relations are reduced to transactions; and, secondly, there is the 'reduction of the relational space' in response to these mechanisations. The former point will be discussed further in Part III: 'Relational' Exchange(s)', so, for now, it is the latter half of Bourriaud's statement that becomes of interest.¹⁶⁷ Here, 'space' does not necessarily just refer to the physical spaces in which 'relational' art can be facilitated.¹⁶⁸ If the material of social relations is intangible, then

¹⁶² Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 26.

¹⁶³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 60.

¹⁶⁴ Hal Foster, 'Arty Party', *London Review of Books*, 25:23 (2003), 21-22, (p. 22).

¹⁶⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁷ 'Part III: 'Relational Exchange(s)' will use Stewart Martin's 'article, 'Critique of *Relational Aesthetics*' as a base to launch an analysis of the inherent complexities of exchange in 'relational' art practices. See: pp. 105-117; Stewart Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics' in *Third Text*, 21.4 (2007), 369-386.

¹⁶⁸ Although, according to the museum studies scholar Janet Marstine, 'relational aesthetics remains sequestered in the white cube of the gallery space,' *Relational Aesthetics* also opens up forums for discussions of space. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud describes 'relational' art as a 'growing urbanisation of the artistic experiment,' that responds to the expansion of urban life and ('the

presumably these artworks can take place anywhere at any time, free of restrictions. Such an idea has led to 'relational' art being presented as transient, a conceptual space that is never static and ever moving from space *to* space. Or, as Bourriaud notes, 'it is no longer possible to regard the contemporary work as a space to be walked through, [...] it is henceforth presented as a period of time to be lived through'.¹⁶⁹ However, even if 'relational' art can be considered as a conceptual project, there are still debates about the spaces where it is experienced, namely the institutions in which 'relational' art is presented to audiences, usually in both public and private galleries and museums. As Beshty has argued, *Relational Aesthetics* does 'not treat the institution as a privileged location, but as yet another locale in the postmodern geography, as any other point where social relations are activated, and never as an emblem of an ideological position'.¹⁷⁰ According to Bourriaud, 'relational' art creates 'free areas' that help in 'freeing up interhuman communications,' which, according to Bourriaud have been restricted in post-industrial societies.¹⁷¹ However, the exclusivity, and ideological structures, of art institutions as receptacles of 'relational art' has been criticised by Beshty, who argues that in these settings:

The viewer is not presented any further occasion for play other than that which is already present in another repressive structures, in fact it is the institution, with the artist facilitating, that engages in these ruses, manipulating the categorical divisions, and masquerading as some other environment (either a bar, kitchen, dance club, etc.).¹⁷²

Thus, irrespective of the supposed ambitions of *Relational Aesthetics* to create convivial environments, it is the space in which it is facilitated that *allows* for potential relationships to develop. In *Relational Aesthetics*, then, it seems fair to assume that 'relational' art is simply seeking permissions, with artists and curators asking institutions: 'can we be 'relational',

crampedness of dwelling spaces). This notion of *Relational Aesthetics* as a response to the city is further explored by Cecile Sachs Olsen, who suggests that 'space is separated from the social by being seen as non-relational and individual/isolated,' thus calling out for the creation of 'free' spaces that encourage interaction and social relations. See: Janet Marstine, *Critical Practice: Artists, Museums, Ethics* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 16; Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 14-15; Cecile Sachs Olsen, *Socially Engaged Art and the Neoliberal City* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 21-24. These debates also crop up in Nikos Papastergiadis' work on 'spatial aesthetics'. Here, Papastergiadis poses a spatial reading of contemporary art based on topography, and focusing on the situational context required for studying art. For Papastergiadis, 'the specific place of art is nor increasingly located in networks that are both above and below the reach of the nation-state,' and the 'idea of the contemporary no longer derives its saliency from spatial-temporal markers of rupture or exclusion'. See: Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Spatial Aesthetics: Rethinking the Contemporary' in *Antinomies of Art and Culture*, ed. by Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2008), pp. 363-381. Kwon has explored collaborative art practices by studying locational identities and the pertinence of *place* and site-specificity. See: Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*.

¹⁶⁹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 15. For an analysis of *Relational Aesthetics* and time(s) see 'Part IV: Relational' Time: Making a Case for *contretemps*. See: pp. 118-164.

¹⁷⁰ Beshty [accessed 17 November 2018].

¹⁷¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 60.

¹⁷² Beshty [accessed 17 November 2018].

please?’ Depending on the contexts, too, there is not necessarily a directive from the institution to reject such proposals. As Day argues, ‘relational’ practices were ‘seen by many to function as a social salve, to cover up society’s problems, or just public relations for the museum’.¹⁷³ Such narratives assumes, again, that ‘relational’ art is has the capacity to perform ‘social good’, providing remedies to society’s ills through auditioning for films or waiting to see a dancer perform to music [Fig. 4].¹⁷⁴ The relations negotiated and facilitated in art institutions are inevitably conditioned by their environment. As Demos notes, ‘Bourriaud, however, is not as one-sided as he is sometimes made out to be’.¹⁷⁵ For example, although idealistic and self-aggrandising in *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud does recognise the impact of exhibition spaces in shaping social relations. As he notes, ‘the exhibition does not dent the social relationships in effect, but it does distort them and project them into a space-time frame encoded by the art system’.¹⁷⁶ The ‘art system’ [*système d’art*] mentioned is a revision of wider calls from the New Left of the 1960s to critique ‘the system’ [*le système*], in which ‘the system’ became a euphemism for prevailing ideologies that perpetuate and maintain systematic inequalities and imbalances of power. This, therefore, shows that within ‘relational aesthetics’ there is an acknowledgement of its contradictions, of being a form that promotes ‘free spaces’ and ‘free interactions’ that are, ultimately, dependent on this very system(s). Or, as Beshty argues *Relational Aesthetics* and ‘relational’ art ‘avoid the predicament of being forced to take a stance on the institution’s role, while working almost exclusively within them’.¹⁷⁷

‘Global’ Relations

The question of relationships between the artists and audiences also extends into studies surrounding the global implications of *Relational Aesthetics*. In considering the ethics involved between the audience-participants relationship to galleries and artistic collaboration, Renate Dohmen draws parallels to ‘ongoing debates within various academic disciplines about the need to negotiate the problem of ‘speaking for’’.¹⁷⁸ Referring to the work of Nikos Papastergiadis, Dohmen addresses the term ‘critical cosmopolitanism,’ stating that ‘it shares relational aesthetics’ concern with the wider social sphere’.¹⁷⁹ This ‘wider social sphere’ is

¹⁷³ Day, p. 295.

¹⁷⁴ The projects mentioned here refer to two of the ‘events’ that Pierre Huyghe contributed to ‘Traffic’. The first, *Casting du Sitcom* took place on Friday 26th January in the conference hall of CAPC and invited visitors to audition for a part in an upcoming, fictional, sitcom; the second refers to *Singing in the Rain*, [Fig. 4] in which a wooden platform was placed in the central exhibition space at CAPC. The platform displayed a gold pair of women’s shoes. During ‘Traffic’'s opening weekend, a dancer would appear at regular intervals to dance to Gene Kelly’s recording of *Singing in the Rain*.

¹⁷⁵ Demos, p. 152, fn 35.

¹⁷⁶ Bourriaud, p. 82.

¹⁷⁷ Beshty [accessed 17 November 2018].

¹⁷⁸ Dohmen, ‘Towards a Cosmopolitan Criticality?’, p. 40.

¹⁷⁹ Dohmen, p. 38.

similar to debates surrounding supposed democratisation of art. According to Gardner, in the 1990s, the focus on democratising art was central to 'Western European art discourse [in] the attempt to consolidate broadly defined models of 'democracy' through the dissolution of boundaries between artwork and audience'.¹⁸⁰ Describing frameworks, including *Relational Aesthetics*, as indicative of 'a pivotal and particular postsocialist trope in Western Europe,' one that 'by virtue of the subtle coercion of behavioural change,' encourages 'the naturalisation of a more broadly hegemonic Western self-satisfaction'.¹⁸¹ This smugness around the idea of art 'doing good' populates many discourses surrounding *Relational Aesthetics*, including those of critics, like Bishop, who present 'relational' art as a lesser than 'socially engaged' or 'participatory' practice on account of its (lack) of politicalness. However, as Papastergiadis articulates in a co-authored essay with curator Gerardo Mosquera, 'relational' art helps to disrupt these accounts, arguing that '[*Relational Aesthetics*] has helped focus attention on the tendency to reduce the merit of artistic work to a narrow form of instrumental welfare benefit and immediate financial return'.¹⁸² This model, within specific cultural contexts, therefore tends to maintain 'a methodology that privileges the preciousness of the object and the uniqueness of the artist'.¹⁸³ When discussing 'relational' art, there is propensity to focus on the artist, rather than the relations that their works may prompt. This, however, is perhaps more of a practical assessment than a theoretical one, since to discuss the 'audience' in general terms falls into the traps of generalisation and homogenisation of subjects. At times, this thesis is guilty of this (necessary) trope, too, given the emphasis on the possibility of, rather than guaranteed, encounters that 'relational' art might facilitate. In considering the 'global' and *Relational Aesthetics* within a wider transhistorical and transcultural sphere, Dohmen states: 'given the complexity of the transnational phenomena that need to be negotiated,' it is essential that critiques are 'premised on an attentive and careful encounter, avoiding the headiness of globalist euphoria while engaging patiently with various modes of critical address'.¹⁸⁴ In light of much-needed critique on offering *truly* global art histories, it is important that subsequent texts on *Relational Aesthetics* recognise the power of social relations across transcultural

¹⁸⁰ Gardner, p. 184.

¹⁸¹ Gardner, p. 184. See, also: Kwon, p. 139.

¹⁸² Nikos Papastergiadis and Gerardo Mosquera, 'The Geopolitics of Contemporary Art', *Ibraaz*, 8 (2014), unpaginated <<https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/109>> [accessed 24 February 2019].

¹⁸³ Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Glimpses of cosmopolitanism in the hospitality of art' *European Journal of Social Theory* 10:1 (2007), 139-152, (p. 148).

¹⁸⁴ Dohmen, 'Towards a Cosmopolitan Criticality?', p. 44. Here, these debates also speak to the application of 'relational aesthetics' elsewhere, for example, in studies of art education, scholars have spoken of the concept's relevance to self-reflexivity – the practice of 'acknowledging how one's interactions within a particular context impact the way she/he interprets phenomena occurring within that context'. According to Rebecca L. Shipe, the prospect of facilitating interhuman relations via 'relational' art and 'relational aesthetics' can create 'positive forms of otherness' that 'can create productive ambiguity'. See: Rebecca L. Shipe, 'Productive Ambiguity: Promoting Cross-Cultural Understanding through Art' in *Convergence of Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Global Civic Engagement*, ed. by Ryan Shin (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2017), pp. 63-79, (p. 66).

contexts, making efforts in the process to not tokenise or *other* societies and cultures. It is not enough to simply transplant ‘relational aesthetics’, and all it encompasses, from one cultural context to another without taking the nuances, histories and concerns of these spaces into account. Similarly, it is necessary for *Relational Aesthetics* to be contextualised according to *its* time and *its* place, but also for those involved to reflect upon their own positions, privileges and the extents to which they benefit from structural inequalities that are inevitably at play.¹⁸⁵ What are, for example, the implications of eating traditional Thai ‘street food’ within the comfort of private institutions with histories of structural racism? What does it mean to be taken on a bus tour of industrial areas on the outskirts of a city, to *observe* the labours of those for whom being in these spaces is necessary for their means of survival rather than a ‘cultural experience’? What does it mean when a white European artist attempts to depict black bodies and experiences?¹⁸⁶ Such questions are vital in addressing ‘relational’ art already in existence, but also in future iterations so as to offer a *fair* reading of artworks and contexts within ‘relational aesthetics’.

Conclusion

In an essay published in the summer of 2020 in the art journal *e-flux*, *Relational Aesthetics* and its contributions to contemporary art were considered by the art historian Sven Lütticken. According to Lütticken, ‘relational aesthetics’ will be remembered for ‘help[ing] inaugurate an era of bland biennale art and project-based ubiquity’.¹⁸⁷ Such a view did not appear out of nowhere; it was not created in a vacuum free from the external influences of *les relations interhumaines*. Instead, Lütticken’s comments are indicative of contemporary attitudes towards *Relational Aesthetics*, attitudes which, more often than not, have been influenced by the plethora of Anglophone critiques available on the subject. Although it is these predominantly English-language texts that have shaped responses to *Relational Aesthetics*, it can be said that it is Francophone texts and contexts that shaped the initiation of ‘relational’

¹⁸⁵ When reflecting on ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,’ Bishop has noted that she ‘was operating with a very North American *October* idea of the “critical” work of art,’ stating that ‘the more time I spend in South America or Eastern Europe, the more confused I am about what my criteria are or should be, because I simply can’t map these criteria onto them; they are just not comparable contexts and histories’. See: Claire Bishop quoted in ‘*Cátedra Arte de Conducta* – Follow Up Interview, Claire Bishop,’ in Tom Finkenpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 204-218, (pp. 214-215).

¹⁸⁶ The artworks referred to here include: Rirkrit Tiravanija’s, *Untitled* (1990); Pierre Huyghe, *Excursion en autobus* (1996); and many examples of Vanessa Beecroft’s projects; see, for example, *White Madonna with Twins* (2006), *VB61 STILL DEATH! DARFUR STILL DEAF?* (2007), and *Le member fantôme* (2015). See, also: Claire Voon, ‘Vanessa Beecroft Publicly Airs a Racist Perspective’, *hyperallergic*, 10 August 2016 <<https://hyperallergic.com/316758/vanessa-beecroft-publicly-air-her-racist-perspective/>> [accessed 23 November 2019].

¹⁸⁷ Sven Lütticken, ‘Performing Preformations: Elements for a Historical Formalism’, *e-flux*, 110 (2020), <<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/110/337195/performing-preformations-elements-for-a-historical-formalism/>> [accessed 9 July 2020].

art as it is known today. To a certain extent, it seems as if little has changed; 'relational' art has merely gone from being 'unhelpfully vague' and 'a bit confusing', to 'bland' and 'ubiquitous'.¹⁸⁸ Over the years, 'relational aesthetics' and 'relational' art have been subjected to numerous critiques, with critics talking about *Relational Aesthetics* as 'persuasive' in some instances, and 'boring', 'specious', and 'cannibalistic argot' in others.¹⁸⁹ Here, the variation in responses from the 'community', 'audience', or, 'participants' of *Relational Aesthetics* highlights the flaw in Bourriaud's writing of assuming that these groups of homogenous entities, representing spaces and peoples as individual and subject to ideological structures and the hierarchies associated with social relations. The uneven power relations and modes of sociability expand into the spaces in which 'relational' art is staged, or presented, which opens up another avenue for critique. But to be facilitated in the spaces that they are, 'relational' art is predisposed to critical interrogations; to occupy the problematic, technically public yet *actually* private spaces within which much 'relational' art exists requires an openness to critique and questioning. Interestingly, Beshty is amongst one of the only critics to mention the geographical and cultural specificities of the 'relational' art being exhibited and contextualised in France, proposing that '*Relational Aesthetics* is born from a distinctly European retreatism [...] and melancholic lamentation of the passing of 68'.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, from a practical point of departure, the funding structures, spaces and resources available to curators at CAPC, and climate of decentralisation of cultural activities from Paris to other cities across the country, contributed towards creating a situation *for* 'relational' art, and was specific to the context of France in the 1990s. However, it is also the theoretical point of departure that can be found in pre-*Relational Aesthetics* aesthetic theory and philosophy. It seems as if in critiquing the 'theoretical' content, or lack thereof, of *Relational Aesthetics* that critics used the idea of 'relational aesthetics' as both practical and theoretical points of departure; 'practically' through formalist analyses of artworks, or allusions to the 'arty parties' or the networks of curators and artists involved with 'relational art; and theoretically through tracing the holes in Bourriaud's writing to return to *original* source materials to offer alternative theories of 'relational aesthetics'. There are distinctions to be made between (the lack of) Francophone critiques of *Relational Aesthetics*, and the overabundance of critical Anglophone counterparts. But even here, these distinctions are representative of the different moments (spatial, historical, temporal) in which they were consumed, interpreted and written. At the beginning

¹⁸⁸ Tsingou [accessed 18 October 2016]; Lütticken [accessed 9 July 2020].

¹⁸⁹ Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen, 'A Note on Socially Engaged Art', *Field Journal* <<http://field-journal.com/issue-6/a-note-on-socially-engaged-art-criticism>> [accessed 13 September 2018]; Scanlan, 'Traffic Control: Social Space and Relational Aesthetics', p.123; Joe Scanlan, 'The Uses of Disorder: The Art of Félix González-Torres', *Artforum*, 2 (2010), 162-170; Christina Catherine Martinez, 'Signs are Everywhere' *Artforum*, 10 June 2020 <<https://www.artforum.com/diary/christina-catherine-martinez-on-drive-by-art-83222>> [accessed 13 September 2020].

¹⁹⁰ Beshty [accessed 17 November 2018].

of this chapter, the framework of Downey's work was mentioned for its emphasis on developing a critical engagement 'with [*Relational Aesthetics*] rather than *passing* critical judgement on his choice of artists'.¹⁹¹ Such a stance has, hopefully, been maintained throughout to offer a contextualisation of *Relational Aesthetics* that, whilst discussing *historical* conditions that contributed to 'relational' art, also continues to work *with*, rather than against *Relational Aesthetics* in efforts to contextualise and *reconsider* its pertinence. Returning, then, to 'The Fall of *Relational Aesthetics*' article, Russeth argues that 'relational aesthetics' is 'a label that was applied to artists by a writer, not a name those artists came up with to describe their work, or one that they've ever really embraced'.¹⁹² With these labels too, came nicknames; Maurizio Cattelan as 'the bad boy of 'relational aesthetics'; Rirkrit Tiravanija as 'poster boy'; Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster as a 'heavyweight'.¹⁹³ Although individual attitudes towards *Relational Aesthetics* vary wildly, including 'relational' artists who refute the label, to a certain extent Bourriaud seems justified in his homogenisation of audiences. In every critique there appears to be an inherent interest in the facilitation, inner workings of, or artistic projects created in the name of 'relational aesthetics', projects which are consistently analysed according to the 'interhuman relations which they represent, produce or prompt'.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Downey, p. 275.

¹⁹² Russeth [accessed 14 March 2019].

¹⁹³ Russeth [accessed 14 March 2019]; Andrew Berardini, 'Everything is Tiravanija's, But It's Also Yours', *X-TRA* 9:3 (2007), 33-38, (p. 34); Roberta Smith, 'Art in Review – Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster: 'euqinimod & costumes'', *The New York Times*, 15 May 2013 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/16/arts/design/dominique-gonzalez-foerster-euqinimod-costumes.html>> [accessed 14 October 2018].

¹⁹⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 112.

Part II

When is Art 'Relational'? A Study of the *Objets de grève*

Having outlined the critiques to which *Relational Aesthetics* has been subjected and having probed some of the key characteristics of what might loosely be interpreted as 'relational' art in the previous chapter, it seems pertinent to now consider 'relational' art that is not quite 'relational'. This may sound like a contradiction, and what follows in this chapter may, at first, seem like a *déviaton* from the intentions of this thesis. The majority of this project is concerned with questioning *Relational Aesthetics* in order to reconsider its interpretation, or position within recent art history. 'Relational' art as a term can be confusing not only, as discussed in the previous chapter, for the wide range of practices and mediums that the term encompasses but also in distinguishing what exactly can be understood as 'relational' in the context of *Relational Aesthetics*. In previous critiques there has been little effort to understand how the context of *Relational Aesthetics* could be used to understand the 'interhuman relationships' that are positioned as the basis for work that would later be described as 'relational'. Of course, there are questions to be asked about the extent to which an artwork might be deemed 'relational', with such questions leading to the inevitable discussions of whether, as Bourriaud noted, 'art has always been relational in varying degrees'.¹⁹⁵ The extent to which an artwork can be 'relational' is open for debate. The 'varying degrees' of 'relationality' can hinge upon a multitude of factors. Yet, it can be argued that the central component of 'relational art' depends on the possibilities of interhuman relations being formed within, or as a result of, the nature of the artwork itself, in whatever form that may or may not take.¹⁹⁶ In what follows, this chapter presents a 'relational' reading of an artwork that has not been described as such. Is the artwork in question 'relational' according to Bourriaud's little black book of 'relational' art and artists? The answer to this question, is simply 'non'. Was the artwork featured in 'Traffic' or succeeding exhibitions of 'relational' art? 'Non' again. In this instance, then, perhaps it would be best to conclude that the artwork in question is *not* relational. If the artwork at the heart of this chapter is indeed *not* 'relational' then is this not a case, or rather chapter, closed? Maybe with this statement this chapter is over before it has even begun. Or perhaps this offers the starting point for this chapter, a chapter which, to begin with, attempts to navigate the murky waters of what makes art 'relational' in the first place. This effort to define 'relational' art is doomed to

¹⁹⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁶ The idea of the form that an artwork may or may not take refers to a discussion of Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno's *The House or Home?* (1995) that takes place in chapter four. See: pp. 129-157. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud discusses the 'forms' that 'relational' art takes, arguing that 'present-day art shows that form only exists in the encounter', thus using the malleability of the term 'form' to support the notion of *Relational Aesthetics* being premised on, and facilitating 'possible encounters'. See: Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 19-23.

fail before it even begins, so hopes of establishing a watertight definition of the term and a list of criteria that allows 'relational' art to be validated or judged on a 'relational' sliding scale of 1-10 are fruitless. As in the previous chapter and elsewhere in this thesis, the idea of 'relational' art is being *reconsidered* here, but this time it is a singular artwork, not *Relational Aesthetics* and its subsequent critiques, that is at the centre of this *reconsideration*. This chapter, then, with its focus on a 'non-relational' artwork can be seen as taking a slight *deviation* from the theoretical nuances of *Relational Aesthetics*. Instead, this chapter takes the 'practical' point of interhuman relations forming the basis for an artwork as its starting point in order to examine how an artwork created 'outside' of *Relational Aesthetics* can lay claim to 'relational' credentials, so as to offer a reconsideration of 'relational' artworks created in France in the 1990s according to its social and historical context.

The artwork in question, whilst not 'relational' in name or *provenance* was born out of interhuman relations, of people coming together to create objects. And, like much of the so-called 'relational' work mentioned in *Relational Aesthetics*, the artwork at the centre of this chapter takes on multiple forms, spanning objects, installations, publications and scenarios *outside* of 'the system' which Bourriaud so elusively described. In the process of doing so, this artwork, by its enduring nature and reliance on interhuman relations creating and receiving the artwork in its various iterations over the years, could be *reconsidered* as 'relational'. So, for now that is enough elusiveness; this thesis is premised on the oft-lack of clarity in *Relational Aesthetics* and so efforts to continue in this fashion will only serve to obfuscate the central premise of this chapter, thus, *replicating* rather than *reconsidering* 'relational' art in a similar vein to that of Bourriaud's oft-critiqued text. So, *et voilà*, here it is: *Documents: 24* and later, *39 Objets de grève* [*Documents: 24*, and later, *39 Strike Objects*], a series of photographs by Jean-Luc Moulène, documenting objects made by striking workers during various industrial disputes between the 1970s and 1990s. The objects documented vary wildly, from counterfeit banknotes, children's shoes, magazines and newspapers to board games, and the various guises in which the work has been presented span across the plethora of 'public' and 'private' spheres that are often at the heart of 'relational' critiques. This artwork, as will be argued, is interesting to consider in light of *Relational Aesthetics* for its encounters with a host of 'spectators' or 'agents', from the workers who created the objects to the audiences who viewed the objects either on display in various settings or who encountered the objects through the different publications in which they were featured. As will be discussed, this artwork, like much of the art described as 'relational', is confusing in its mediums and complex in its own relationship to relationality. The pertinence of this example to a study such as this which seeks to offer a socio-historical reading of 'relational' art, then, is the reliance on context required for interpreting the objects and their appearance in subsequent iterations of the *Objets de grève* series. From the objects depicted to the theoretical questions surrounding the 'documenting'

of sources, 24, and later, 39 *Objets de grève* offers a gateway into considering the interactions of art, history and society, and the pre-existing, enduring and subsequent relations necessary to an analysis of artworks premised on *les relations interhumaines*, even in spite of its absence from *Relational Aesthetics*.

'Not "sexy", not "cool", nor "fun."¹⁹⁷ This is how one critic described the oeuvre of the French artist Jean-Luc Moulène. Born in Reims, a city in the north-eastern Grand Est *département*, Moulène is an artist who, since the late 1970s, has experimented across mediums, with much of his work being based on the practices of photography and sculpture. The categorisation of his work into mediums such as photography and sculpture are, however, labels that Moulène refutes, with the artist preferring to describe his work as *documents* [documents] and *objets* [objects] a point which will be discussed later in this chapter. Moulène's work is expansive; his artistic career began after attending and assisting events hosted by Michel Journiac – one of the co-founders of the *Art corporel* [body art] movement in France in the 1960s and 1970s – before embarking on creating his own *documents*, often consisting of photographic series taken over a prolonged period of time, 3D objects and site-specific installations.¹⁹⁸ His work has been exhibited globally; including participating in Documenta X (1997), the Sao Paulo Biennale (2002) and representing France at the 50th Venice Biennale (2003) and, more recently, his work has been the subject of individual exhibitions at Dia:Beacon in New York (2011), the Kunstverein in Hannover (2015) and a retrospective exhibition at Paris' Centre Pompidou (2016). Before beginning this chapter, it should be noted that the inclusion of this information is purely contextual and is not intended as a means of elevating the status of the artist according to the nature of a contemporary art scene which seems to thrive from the lauding of particular artists and their so-called 'successes', with signs of 'success' being accrued through appearances at specific exhibition venues, art fairs and biennales. What follows in this chapter is also not an attempt to recount the life of Moulène, using his personal biography and interests in order to offer an account of the various *Documents* and *Objects*. Instead, this chapter considers Moulène's *Documents: 24 Objets de grève*, which later became *Documents: 39 Objets de grève* through a 'relational' lens. This work is of particular interest given, as will be argued later in this chapter, its direct, and arguably *relational*, engagement not only between striking workers and artist but between striking workers, artist and a wider audience, for whom viewing the objects can build or expand their knowledge of social movements, and, thus, the context in which the objects were created before becoming part of an artwork. Here, it is important to note that there is no intention of ascribing Moulène as an artist who speaks *for* striking workers, or on behalf of those

¹⁹⁷ Évence Verdier, 'Jean-Luc Moulène: la guerre des images', *artpress*, 295 (2003), 38-43, (p. 38).

¹⁹⁸ For further details of *l'art corporel*, see: François Pluchart, *L'art corporel* (Paris: Galerie Stadler, 1975). See also: Michel Journiac, *Écrits* (Paris: Beaux-Arts de Paris éditions, 2013).

campaigning for fairer working hours, equality in the workplace and decent pensions. Rather, Moulène's *Documents: 24*, and later, *39 Objets de grève*, in its various forms, are being discussed to highlight how such an artwork could not exist without the (inter)actions and activities of striking workers. It is this aspect of the work, in addition to the context in which many of the strike objects were made and then viewed, that will be the main focus of this chapter in an effort to demonstrate the various ways in which art that exists outside of label of 'relational aesthetics', as explored in the previous chapter, contains vital information and documentation of the wider context of socio-political environment of France in the 1990s. To explore this, it is first necessary to examine particular *objets* themselves in order to understand how the often-overlooked histories of the conditions in which these objects were created can establish these objects as 'relational'. Following this, this chapter will consider the implications of these objects being both *documents* and *documented* in considering their relevance to representations of 'interhuman relations' and 'relationality'. Finally, this chapter examines the multiple spaces (local, artistic, archival, social and historical) that these *objets* occupy or come to represent, in order to question the ways in which the presentation and reception of the *Documents: 24*, and *39 Objets de grève* continue to rely on the premise of both sharing past relations, and facilitating future forums for sociability through 'relational' art.

Documents: 24, and 39 Objets de grève

From the 1980s until the mid-1990s, Jean-Luc Moulène collected *objets de grève* [strike objects]. Strike objects are generally defined as 'objects made in small series by workers during industrial conflicts'.¹⁹⁹ These objects have 'various functions and forms' but 'do not fit into ordinary industrial production'.²⁰⁰ Such is to say, then, that strike objects vary widely depending on the workers' conflicts taking place and the objects that a company or workers are adept at producing, with the fruits of their striking labour usually serving the purpose of raising awareness of the particular issues that have resulted in strike action in the first place. Moulène collected a total of forty different strike objects which he donated to the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail [National Archives of the Working World] in Roubaix, in 2003, after the Centre Pompidou purchased the photographic series documenting these objects for their permanent collection.²⁰¹ These objects range in forms, from *Chômageopoly*, an altered version of the popular boardgame Monopoly, that was made by workers facing mass unemployment in 1973-4, packets of cigarettes made by striking tobacco factory workers in 1982-3 that could not be sold or smoked, to imitation bank notes printed by striking bank

¹⁹⁹ Jean-Charles Leyris, 'Objets de grève, un patrimoine militant', *In Situ: Revue des patrimoines*, 8 (2007), <doi.org/10.4000/insitu.3044> [accessed 12 March 2019], unpaginated.

²⁰⁰ Leyris, unpaginated.

²⁰¹ Leyris, unpaginated.

workers in 1996-8 that included information about the threats being made to public sector workers in the face of the mass cuts to public spending being proposed by the then government.²⁰² The majority of the objects in this collection were made by workers on strike in France at French companies, with the exception being a copy of the *International Herald Tribune* from 1987 which features blank spaces where photographs would illustrate newspaper articles owing to photojournalists striking at the time.²⁰³ Although the objects differ in form, ranging from leaflets and illustrated books to perfume bottles and children's shoes, Jean-Charles Leyris, an archivist specialising in the preservation of historic documents for the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication [Ministry of Culture and Communication], argues that all of the objects share a common purpose of 'being particularly useful for popularising or financing strike action'.²⁰⁴ In this sense, the correlations between the objects in this collection are evident in terms of the general conditions in which they were produced, but perhaps what is not initially clear upon viewing or reading about the *objets* is the specificity of particular objects and their relevance to the workers' movements from which they emerged. For this reason, before embarking on a study of Moulène's photographs of these objects, it is useful to understand the specific contexts in which they emerged. Whilst there is a total of forty objects to choose from, for the purpose of this study the example of *Chômageopoly* will be discussed to demonstrate how an initial viewing of a photograph of this *objet* obscures some of the complex, and often enduring circumstances in which the strike objects were produced, and how such information is absent from the objects when exhibited in their photographic form.

Chômageopoly and l'affaire LIP

Chômageopoly was first created in 1974 by workers striking at the LIP watch factory in Besançon, the capital of the Doubs *département* in eastern France. The strike action was born out of calls from the company's management to streamline production at the factory, thus leading to job losses across the factory, which, at the time, one was of the largest employers

²⁰² These specific examples will be explored later in the chapter. For context, the term *chômageopoly* is a portmanteau of *chômage*, the French word for unemployment which is also used to describe unemployment benefit; for example, *toucher le chômage* is a colloquial saying equivalent to the English of 'being on the dole', with the 'opoly', coming from the popular banking boardgame Monopoly that was first created in the USA in 1935. Monopoly was first introduced to France in 1936 and various regional versions of the game have been licensed since then. The usage of Monopoly as the basis for the workers' inverted version of the game is interesting considering that the idea for the boardgame (designed by Lizzie Magie and originally called The Landlord's Game) was born out of an opposition to the monopolisation of housing and private landlords in the USA in the early 1900s. See: Mary Pilon, *The Monopolists: Obsession, Fury and the Scandal Behind the World's Favourite Board Game* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

²⁰³ Roubaix, Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, 2003 025 001 – Objets de grève – Objets en papier, *International Herald Tribune*, journal du 5 juin 1987, no. 32,434, 18 pages, 75 x 38 cm.

²⁰⁴ Leyris, unpaginated.

in the area. To raise awareness of, and finance for, the strike action, workers set about creating a boardgame premised on the processes and experiences of ongoing industrial action, with the result being *Chômageopoly*, a multi-player boardgame based on Monopoly. However, in the workers' version of Monopoly, in which players usually compete to own as many properties as possible and bankrupt others, players were encouraged to work together [*les joueurs doivent s'unir*] in the hope of the game 'illustrating how collective action can combat the system'.²⁰⁵ As the instructions informed players, this deviation from usual playing rules was 'unlike the usual competition between players, which expresses the division of workers that the system wants to perpetuate'.²⁰⁶ In *Chômageopoly* players could only win by helping each other, thus the workers who designed the game hoped that potential players would understand that:

This game finally expresses the condition of all struggle: to understand the essence of power relations and to put pressure on all sides to create a favourable spirit, while leaving room for celebration, reflection and play, because if the system can take away our work, it will not take away from us our humour and desire to express everywhere and even in a game, our determination to recover our jobs.²⁰⁷

In the workers' iteration of the game each player was given a game piece that represented a group of workers on strike at a particular company. Players worked together to garner support for their particular strikes; for example, rather than collecting Monopoly 'money', players collected cards with illustrations of workers performing the workers' salute of a raised fist in increments that indicated the number of fellow strikers that supported their cause ranging from '1 fellow striker to rebalance power relations' to '20 fellow strikers to rebalance power relations'.²⁰⁸ As players worked their way around the board they were encouraged to 'collect' and suppress members of the 'system' indicated by red squares that the creators described

²⁰⁵ 'the system' [*le système*] is explained in the instructions for *Chômageopoly* and in this context refers to 'the government, the employers and the system which made workers unemployed and have to search for new jobs'. The instructions go on to state that 'pressure must be applied to all sources of public power at both local and national levels,' and argues that 'workers must resist threats of any kind, that can emerge for different directions and exert power: trustees, the police, the A.N.P.E (l'Agence nationale pour l'emploi) [The National Agency for Employment] – a government agency designed to help people look for employment from its founding in 1967 until its dissolution in 2008). Roubaix, Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, 2003 025 026 – Objets de grève – Objets divers, *Chômageopoly* – jeu de société, 1974.

²⁰⁶ *Chômageopoly* – jeu de société, 1974.

²⁰⁷ *Chômageopoly* – jeu de société, 1974. Original text: '*Ce jeu exprime enfin la condition de toute lutte: comprendre la nature des rapports de force et peser de tout côté pour créer un train favorable, tout en laissant place à la fête, à la réflexion et au jeu, car si le système peut enlever notre travail, il ne nous enlèvera pas notre humour et notre volonté d'exprimer partout et même dans un jeu, votre détermination de retrouver un travail.* Here, *enlever* has been translated to mean 'to take away' rather than its usual definition of 'to remove' and 'retrouver' has been translated as 'recover' rather than 'find' given the context of the game and threats of job losses being proposed by employers.

²⁰⁸ *Chômageopoly* – jeu de société, 1974.

in the game's instructions; for example, characters akin to *les patrons* [the bosses] were included such as 'Monsieur l'Industrie' [Mr. Industry] alongside government agencies like *l'ANPE* [the National Agency for Employment]. Players could work together to garner further support for their causes if their marker landed on a green square; for example, if a player landed on the *Soutien du public* [support of the public] square, then all of the players and their respective strikes would reap the benefits of this square by 'winning' more support. Players also faced obstacles that would impede the advancement and resolution of their respective industrial disputes; for example, players might draw cards which read 'The police invade, force workers to evacuate and occupy your factory. You win in popularisation, but you are restrained in your activities. Take away 2 power relations points and wait two turns'.²⁰⁹ In this sense, the hypothetical situations of the game paralleled various industrial disputes in the 1960s and 70s in France and many of the scenarios mirrored the *actual* nature of the LIP workers' dispute – ranging from the police removing workers from the occupied factory sites to gaining support from colleagues in other unions, up until the point that the dispute was resolved in 1974. Although the intentions of *Chômageopoly* intended to showcase the positive potential of collective action and subvert the rules of Monopoly which rely on luck and individualism to be crowned the 'winner', outcomes of the game did not always favour the resolutions being sought by striking workers; for example although some propositions such as no redundancies, a 'rehiring of all workers' or workers' co-operative being formed to seize the means of production were possible, it was also possible for the workers in the game to be unable to overthrow proposed changes, resulting the 'dismantling of the firm and layoffs'.²¹⁰ It was this focus, then, and the true to life nature of the game that its scenarios represented, which led *Chômageopoly* to be described by LIP workers as a 'good means of popularisation' whilst also serving as 'an excellent training tool', in helping workers to understand power relations in the workplace and potential outcomes of collective action.²¹¹

In a similar vein of the boardgame intending to promote the positive potentialities of collective action and *solidarité* amongst workers, the production of *Chômageopoly* was not performed solely by striking LIP workers. The boardgame was the product of multiple collaborations between LIP workers who conceived the idea and workers involved in other industrial disputes at different companies across France; for example, the box was made by Sitrab, a company based in Vosges, the plastic pieces were made by the Société Centrale de Plastique et de Caoutchouc in Clermont-Ferrand, whilst artists including Forcadell and Kerleroux penned illustrations for the game's various components.²¹² *Chômageopoly* was

²⁰⁹ *Chômageopoly* – jeu de société, 1974.

²¹⁰ Donald Reid, *Opening the Gates: The LIP Affair, 1968-1981* (London; New York: Verso, 2018), p. 344.

²¹¹ *LIP Unité* – 6, 6th November 1976, p. 3.

²¹² Reid, p. 344.

produced in relatively small quantities when it was first released in 1974 but continued industrial action and interest in workers' causes was significant enough that a second edition of the game was printed and circulated in 1977.²¹³ The reasons for this can perhaps be best explained once the context that the game was produced is understood. LIP is a French watch and clock-making company founded in 1867 and, for 100 years, operated in relative anonymity. Although its products were once considered as 'the pride of French watchmaking' in the mid-twentieth century, the firm rarely made headlines for anything other than its craftsmanship.²¹⁴ It was in the early 1960s that things at LIP started to change after the company moved to its larger premises in Palente, a suburb in the east of Besançon which allowed it to expand its operations. Workers at the factory participated in the occupations and protests of May '68 when, at the time, around a quarter of LIP employees were unionised, with staff having the option to join the CFDT (*Confédération française démocratique du travail*) or the CGT (*Confédération Générale du Travail*).²¹⁵ The gravity of the events of May '68 were felt across France, especially in increasing the unionisation of workplaces. Following May '68, union membership at LIP, like in other companies across France, grew and by the early 1970s it was estimated that half of LIP's workforce were members of unions.²¹⁶ It was around this time, too, that LIP's relative anonymity began to fade. Even the slightest mention of the company became synonymous with labour activism and industrial action; industrial action which, according to the labour historian Donald M. Reid 'developed directly out of May '68'.²¹⁷ LIP started making headlines on April 17th, 1973, when the company became the centre of

²¹³ In the second dispute between 1976-1977, at least 1,000 copies of the game were in circulation in early 1977 and LIP workers reported that 10,000 copies of the game had been sold by September 1978. See: Reid, pp. 342-346.

²¹⁴ Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s* (Oxford; New York: Berghahn Books, Ltd., 2004), p. 63.

²¹⁵ Reid, p. 52. In his book, Reid discusses some of the complexities between the theoretical informing of different trade unions alongside the working culture of striking workers at LIP. For example, many of the workers drew from their left-wing Catholicism in order to formulate their position advocating for social justice tended to be members of the CFDT ('*Les Lip* demanded rights in a language infused with Catholic humanism', p. 12), the union with the highest proportion of unionised members at LIP. The Communist-led CGT had relatively few members at LIP until post-68 when union membership rose in accordance with renewed interests in what were arguably considered more 'political' unions. Throughout *l'affaire Lip*, Charles Piaget, a trade unionist central to the organisation of the strike, worked to unite support from both unions as well as harnessing the support of the minority union CFTC (*Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens* [The French Confederation of Christian Workers]), most of whose members were mechanics at the LIP factory. The theoretical and theological differences between Catholic and Communist workers reflected wider contemporary philosophical such as Louis Althusser's discussions of Marxist-humanism, as well as becoming the basis for the collaborative reflections on revolutions by Philippe Philippe Gavi, Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Victor. See: Reid, pp. 12-46; Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London; New York: Verso, 2005), and Philippe Gavi, Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Victor, *On a Raison de se révolter* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 222-228; 250-255.

²¹⁶ Reid, p. 52.

²¹⁷ Reid, p. 59. See also, François-Henri de Virieu, *LIP: 100,000 montres sans patron* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1973), pp. 7-12.

one of the most notorious workers' struggles in recent French history. What started as a general strike intended to last a couple of weeks evolved into industrial action which went on for eleven months and involved workers occupying the factory, seizing the means of production and creating their own democratic system of managing the production and circulation of the products being made. This particular movement, and its subsequent re-emergence in 1976, became widely known as *l'affaire LIP* [The LIP Affair].

Following May '68, production continued at LIP and employees worked in shift patterns around the clock to fulfil orders. However, by 1973 LIP was 'struggling' financially and so a decision was made by the 'Swiss majority shareholder to close down the larger part of its operations' in Besançon.²¹⁸ This plan inevitably involved job losses and cuts to wages but the information that workers received from management was vague; there were no details about why jobs were being cut or which elements of production would remain onsite in Besançon. As has since been noted, the LIP factory's location was central to the worries of workers since it was 'located in an area where all other factories were much smaller,' hence 'the lack of job opportunities for the workers and the concern of a large part of the population about the conflict'.²¹⁹ Workers questioned LIP's operations and reasonings for the proposed closures but, when they received little to no response, took matters into their own hands. On April 17th, 1973, workers began their occupation of the Besançon LIP factory site. Just three days after the initial decision to withdraw their labour and start a general strike, workers formed the Action Committee – a democratic management system that would prove crucial to decisions made in the months that followed. In the weeks that followed, management of the LIP factory attempted to open dialogue with workers but their lack of clarity on issues such as job security and unwillingness to negotiate with workers meant that striking workers, understandably, dismissed such platitudes. By early June, there were still no signs of workers relenting and a public protest in which over 50,000 people marched in support of the striking LIP workers only served to boost momentum for the cause.²²⁰ On June 10th, more workers joined the factory occupation and two days later workers had sequestered an estimated 25,000 watches.²²¹ Over the next few days the General Assembly of Workers voted to begin production of watches under their own governance and began selling these on June 20th. So, whilst workers began production under their own terms, demonstrating their craftsmanship and knowledge of all faculties of the LIP enterprise from making items to distributing them, it was necessary to

²¹⁸ Christofferson, p. 63.

²¹⁹ Thomas Baumgartner, Tom R. Burns and Philippe De Ville, *The Shaping of Socio-Economic Systems: The Application of the Theory-Actor System Dynamics to Conflict, Social Power, and Institutional Innovation in Economic Life* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 200, n. 21.

²²⁰ Olivier Pavillon, 'La Nouvelle Gauche en Suisse romande, des années 60 au milieu des années 80: un essai de mise en perspective', *Cahiers d'Histoire du Mouvement Ouvrier*, 21 (2005), 7-30, p. 21.

²²¹ Christofferson, p. 63.

distinguish the watches made during this period from those when workers were not *en grève*. In this instance, it was the casebacks (the inner) of the watches made during the factory occupation that were altered, with each item being engraved dates of the ongoing industrial action and an inscription which stated ‘*CONFLIT LIP*’ [LIP conflict]. Alongside this, there was another inscription which read ‘*VENTE SAUVAGE*’ [unauthorised sale], a term deliberately chosen to describe the fact that products were ‘technically’ being circulated outside of the economy in which they would usually be being exchanged; for example, all funds raised from the sales of the ‘*CONFLIT LIP*’ watches and *Chômageopoly* were being used to finance the ongoing industrial conflict.²²² The term ‘*VENTE SAUVAGE*’, here, referenced the initial premise of the boardgame to demonstrate opposition to, and strategies of combatting the loosely named ‘system’ which referred to employers, government and legal ‘systems’ that had the capacities to infringe upon workers’ rights, pay and access to unemployment benefits.²²³ It was during this period, too, that LIP workers popularised the slogan ‘*on fabrique, on vend, on se paie!*’ [‘We make, we sell, we pay ourselves’]. Early August saw workers hanging banners painted with this statement across the factory premises to relay the message of their success at self-organising and re-establishing production and distribution of the products. The banner marked a celebration, as workers received their first pay-packets from their reorganised activities. Building on the recent memory of May ’68, LIP workers borrowed slogans used by the Atelier Populaire when creating simple screenprints that were circulated both within the factory and local community to reiterate the importance of strike action; as one example read: ‘*ton patron a besoin de toi, tu n’as pas besoin de lui*’ [‘your boss needs you, you don’t need him’], accompanied by an illustration in which a worker and boss were distinguished from one another by the hats each wore next to a sketch of the LIP factory, with the worker then being depicted as kicking the boss out of the factory and removing his hat in the process.²²⁴

Despite growing public support for LIP workers *en grève*, in part due to the capitalisation of popular imagery and slogans that were familiar to those who had participated in the events of May ’68, LIP management remained tight-lipped about the company’s plans.

²²² The term *vente sauvage* stems from the French saying *vente à la sauvette* which translates as ‘selling or distributing ‘on the sly’’. This term is often used to describe activities that take place outside of monitored transactions; for example, when referring to ‘backroom sales’, ‘street hawking’ or other undeclared financial transactions.

²²³ *Chômageopoly* – jeu de société, 1974.

²²⁴ See: *Les LIP, l’imagination au pouvoir*, dir. by Christian Rouard (Les Films d’Ici, 2007). The illustration of the LIP factory on the poster closely resembles the factories [*usines*] depicted in a number of Atelier Populaire posters in 1968; see for example, posters including the slogans ‘*vive les occupations d’usines*’ [‘long live the factory occupations’], ‘*oui, usines occupées*’ [‘yes, factories occupied’] and, ‘*soutien aux usines occupées pour la victoire du peuple*’ [‘support the occupied factories for the victory of the people’], in Johan Kugelberg and Philippe Vermès, eds., *Beauty is in the Street: A Visual Record of the May ’68 Paris Uprising* (London: Four Corners Books, 2011).

In spite of the strike, LIP management were still seeking options to sell the company without relaying this information to their workers, or, as one worker noted in an interview in *Le Monde*, 'there is total lack of information, and now there is a total lack of decision'.²²⁵ A mediator, Henri Giraud, was appointed to open up dialogue between the workers and management. However, when these efforts failed, the police intervened and an assault on workers resulted in the police 'retaking the factory and forcing the workers back into the local community'.²²⁶ Six weeks later on 29th September, an estimated 100,000 people participated in marches across Besançon in support of the LIP factory workers still on strike.²²⁷ Support came from LIP employees from other factory sites in France and Switzerland, union members and the general public, many of whom felt that the strike action was indicative of the 'unequal successes' experienced between companies and their workers.²²⁸ Public support of the workers did little in terms of management reassessing their offer to those on strike and in October LIP workers voted to reject the proposals. Negotiations continued and in January 1974 workers voted to accept an offer that would allow them to resume their work at the factory without suffering any losses to their hours, holiday entitlement or salaries. The strike, therefore, was successful in enabling workers to understand their collective capacity for change. LIP workers were lauded at the time by critics for their commitment to collective action, rather than relying on a singular voice to represent the demands of the workers.²²⁹ The LIP strike publicly renewed the importance of the need for transparency between management and workers, thus echoing views from the media expressed at the beginning of the strike almost a year prior. As one journalist noted, had management been more forthcoming with information and less inclined to spread *contre-vérités* [untruths], 'the workers would not have challenged the company analyses and would have left a sinking ship like good market actors'.²³⁰ In the weeks that followed, the LIP factory gradually reopened and by the end of 1974 staff had secured their jobs for the foreseeable future. In the meantime, though, *l'affaire LIP* had captured public imagination and was regularly discussed in newspapers, magazines and television debates. The continued interest in *l'affaire LIP* even led to the then manager, Claude Neuschwande,

²²⁵ 'Face aux représentants du personnel M. Edgar Faure se prononce pour un essai de participation des ouvriers de Lin à la Gestion', *Le Monde*, 27th June 1973, p. 25. See also: 'Des financiers britanniques s'intéressent à LIP', *Le Monde*, 27th June 1975, p. 25. This article includes information about an unnamed British company interested in a potential takeover of LIP. Their visit to Besançon included a meeting with management at the Hotel Frantel and a visit to the occupied factory where workers were asked for reassurance that there would be no 'incidents' that would interrupt production.

²²⁶ Marie Černá, John Davis, Robert Gildea, et. Al., 'Revolutions' in *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt*, ed. by Robert Gildea, James Mark and Annette Warring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 107-130, (p. 127).

²²⁷ Černá, Davis, Gildea, et. Al., p. 127.

²²⁸ Anouar Khaled, 'Lip. L'action de l'extrême gauche', *Politique Hebdo*, 10973 (1973), 25, (p. 25).

²²⁹ See, for example, Philippe Gavi, Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Victor, *On a Raison de se révolter* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 250-255.

²³⁰ François-Henri de Virieu quoted in Reid, p. 131.

publishing a book about his experience. Using his self-imposed ‘wisdom’ of dealing with workplace conflicts attempted to position himself as some form of management guru.²³¹ Needless to say, Neuschwander’s self-congratulatory public displays were premature and at the beginning of 1976, just a few months after the publication of his managerial handbook, he was forced to resign from the company. LIP struggled to navigate its production alongside workers who, for the most part, had participated in the strikes of 1973-4. After a change in management and suspicion on the workers’ part of threats to their jobs, in May 1976 workers voted to withdraw their labour again and occupy the Besançon factory. Using the previous strike as a precedent, striking workers, again, embodied their slogan of *on fabrique, on vend, on se paie!* by sequestering watches and voting to restart production so as to pay their own salaries. This time, though, in order for the production of watches to be made legal so as to avoid police raids for ‘unlawful production’, workers voted to establish their own company, *Les Industries de Palente*, conveniently abbreviated to L.I.P. It was during the second wave of factory occupations in 1976-77 that a second run of *Chômageopoly* was printed and, as had happened before, the box of each game featured information that clearly stated it had been made by LIP workers on strike.²³² This time, however, funds raised from *Chômageopoly* could be circulated legitimately within ‘the system’ outlined in the workers’ rules. Although efforts were made by LIP workers to continue production whilst *en grève*, LIP was liquidated in September 1977 due to the inability of management to source buyers for the ailing business. However, in spite of this, in the early 1980s a collection of six *Sociétés coopérative et participative* (SCOP) [Cooperative and Participatory Societies], a form of workers’ cooperative with their roots in *associations ouvrières* [workers’ associations] of the 19th century, came together to re-establish production at LIP and provide jobs for those impacted by the closure of the factory just a few years earlier.²³³ Together, the SCOPs managed to restart production at the Besançon factory and maintained this until the firm’s eventual closure in 1990.²³⁴

***Chômageopoly* as ‘Relational’?**

So, this is all well and good, but what is its relevance to a *reconsideration of Relational Aesthetics*? If nothing, is this just a *deviation*, a potted history of an object amongst many others that was once photographed, with the photographs occasionally being displayed in galleries whilst the *objets de grève* remain locked in an archive - to be viewed by appointment

²³¹ Charles Neuschwander, *Patron, mais* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975).

²³² Boxes in both the 1973-4 and 1976 strikes featured the statement: ‘*ce jeu a été conçu et réalisé par les travailleurs de LIP*’ [this game was designed and made by LIP workers].

²³³ See: Guy-Patrick Azémar, *Ouvriers, ouvrières: un continent morcelé et silencieux* (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1992), pp. 177-9.

²³⁴ CFDT, ‘L’affaire Lip, 1973’, *Archives des Confédération française Démocratique du travail – CFDT*, 14 November 2016. <<https://archives.memoires.cfdt.fr/Document-du-moment/p28/L-affaire-Lip-1973>> [accessed 19 August 2019].

only? To a certain extent, the answer to this question might be 'yes', however, the points just mentioned are inherent to the complexities at play in the 'relationality' of *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève*. The *objets*, then, being born out of *les relations interhumaines* and traversing both the 'public' and 'private' spheres of everyday life and current affairs to galleries and archives across France, present a curious case study of the degree to which art of the 1990s can be considered 'relational'. Their omission from *Relational Aesthetics*, as will be argued, is not enough for the artwork and objects to be considered 'non-relational', since to do so overlooks the interhuman relations that are at the root of their creation, and the subsequent opportunities for 'relationality' offered by *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* in their numerous iterations over the years. Yet, here, it is also not the case that this artwork is being discussed in an effort to *prove* its 'relationality' - to question their absence in *Relational Aesthetics*. To do so implies that it is those artists, and those artists only, who were mentioned by Bourriaud that lay claim to creating 'relational' art, even if many have subsequently refuted the label.²³⁵ The intention here, through offering a history of an object that was later collected and photographed as part of the *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève*, is to highlight how *Chômageopoly*, like other *objets de grève*, was the product of, and dependent upon, *les relations interhumaines*. Thus, at their very basis the *objets de grève* have as their 'practical point of departure' a degree of 'relationality'. It is useful to substantiate this point further, rather than classifying *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* as 'relational' according to Bourriaud's vague assertion that 'art has always been relational in varying degrees'.²³⁶ Rather, in the context of the *objets de grève*, it is another of Bourriaud's claims that can be pondered in discussing the 'relationality' of strike objects. For Bourriaud, 'contemporary art is definitely developing a political project when it endeavours to move into the relational realm'.²³⁷ What remains to be asked here, then, is what might this mean for an object which, rather than 'moving' into *the* 'relational realm', is a product of a 'relational realm'? This, coupled alongside objects that, due to being created in the midst of industrial action can be considered as products of a 'political project', seems, in theory, to create the basis for a 'relational' work of art.

As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, Bourriaud's claims are problematic; the nature of the 'political' in *Relational Aesthetics* is presented in a way that only hints towards a utopianism of the future, rather than probing politics of the 'contemporary'. In Bourriaud's view, 'relational' art can be 'political', but is posited in a way that suggests that it is a just another

²³⁵ See, for example, Philippe Parreno, whose work is discussed in further detail in Part III: 'Relational' Exchanges. When asked if his work facilitates relationships he simply replied, 'they don't'. Ben Lewis, *Art Safari: Relational Art*, 2004, <<http://www.benlewis.tv/shop/stream-films-now/art-safari/relational-art-art-safari/stream-relational-art/>> [accessed 16 January 2019].

²³⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 15.

²³⁷ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 17.

step on the ladder towards the ‘future of art, as an instrument of emancipation, and as a political tool’.²³⁸ However, what is it about the ‘relational’ art described by Bourriaud that is pointing towards the future? To this end, it seems fair to ask if ‘relational’ art is aspirational? Perhaps considering whether the multiplicity of forms that were exhibited in ‘Traffic’ will one day be remembered as the blueprints for art that is simultaneously ‘political’ and ‘emancipatory’. If *the* ‘goal’ of ‘relational’ art was to contribute towards such future forms, it still has some way to go. Since the early 2000s the term ‘relational’ has been banded around exhibitions and biennales, resulting in certain critics describing *Relational Aesthetics* and ‘relational’ art as ‘boring’ and ‘contrived’.²³⁹ However, the objects of *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* were created in their respective moments out of inherently political contexts, therefore rendering the *objets de grève* as ‘political’ objects made in opposition to the various prevailing ‘systems’ that workers were striking against. In addition, the *objets de grève* were created out of interhuman relationships, of people coming together to have discussions, create objects and consider the extent to which their ‘emancipation’ was possible in their given situations. In many instances the strike objects made by workers *en grève*, as was the case with *Chômageopoly*, were either sold to finance strike action or circulated to raise awareness of industrial disputes, so, in the most practical sense, were actively contributing to the various ‘emancipations’ of sorts being sought. What might it mean, then, for *les relations interhumaines* to be interpreted in the context of a subverted version of Monopoly in the 1970s? Does the very decade in which the boardgame was created somehow justify its omission from *Relational Aesthetics*? Or, instead, are *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève*, through their multiple forms, displays and temporalities, and the multiple spaces that created both the conditions for the creation and consideration of strike objects and forms of collectivity, reminiscent of what would later be described as ‘relational’ art? It is for these reasons, as will now be explored, that allow *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* to be presented as some form of anomaly; as an artwork that, when studied from its ‘practical point of departure’, including the social relations and sociohistorical conditions necessary for such an analysis, allows the nature of ‘relational’ art and *Relational Aesthetics* to be both questioned and contextualised as products of 1990s France. To do so, it is necessary to address the following elements of *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève*: firstly, the issues of the display associated with the *Documents* in their various forms and the ‘relationality’ of these outputs; secondly, the complexities of Moulène’s artworks being described as ‘documents’; and, finally, the form of the *objets de grève* themselves and the various histories to which they speak, thus creating spaces for the facilitation of *les relations interhumaines*.

²³⁸ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 78.

²³⁹ Scanlan, p. 123.

Issues of Display

Before going any further, it is important to address the distinction here between the 24 and 39 *Objets de grève* and the reasonings for their discussion in this thesis. *Documents: 24 Objets de grève*, as the name suggests, is a collection of 24 strike objects that were photographed by Moulène and were first exhibited in 1999, thus acting as the *first* presentation of this particular collection of objects together. *Documents: 39 Objets de grève* is an expanded version of the first project of 24, comprising a series of 39 photographs of strike objects that were first presented in 2000 at another exhibition of Moulène's in eastern France. However, the number of the *objets* featured in the *Documents* series has varied, from 16, to 24, to 30, to 39, to 40. It is the 39 *objets de grève*, with 'objets' here referring to the strike objects themselves rather than the photographs, which Moulène donated to the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, a national archive located in a former textile factory in Roubaix, a town on the outskirts of Lille, in 2003.²⁴⁰ When donated, however, the 39 *Objets de grève* were actually the 40 *Objets de grève*, with these 40 *objets* being presented in their entirety for the first time in 2003 as a special supplement to the monthly magazine *La Nouvelle Vie ouvrière*.²⁴¹ This was not the first instance where photographs of the *objets de grève* had been published, though, with *Documents: 24 Objets de grève* first appearing in print in *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'art Moderne* in 2000.²⁴² This variation in the number is relevant because, rather than the collection of the *objets* acting as a totality in and of itself, the *objets* presented in the *Documents* series, via various formats, have instead been selected and grouped together, seemingly at random in subsequent presentations. Between 1999 and 2003, *Documents: 24* or *39 Objets de grève* appeared in various formats; for example, the Centre Pompidou exhibited the work under the title *Seize Objets de grève* [*Sixteen Strike Objects*]; when exhibiting at the Sao Paulo biennale (2002), Moulène created a publication featuring 30 of the *objets de grève* which was printed in a run of 100,000, with a further

²⁴⁰ The Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail was first initiated in 1983 but opened its permanent premises in Roubaix a decade later. The archives are part of a national collection dedicated to 'collecting, classifying, communicating and enhancing the archives of actors in economic and professional life: companies, unions, works, councils, professional organisations, associations working in the world of work'. The archive contains many resources pertaining to regional union activity across France, although documents relating to specific unions can be found in their respective archives. See: Ministère de la Culture, *Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail* <<http://www.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/camt/>> [accessed 12 February 2019].

²⁴¹ See: Jean-Luc Moulène, 'Quarante objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène', *NVO* 3057 (2003). *La Nouvelle Vie ouvrière* [*The New Worker's Life*] (NVO) is a French trade union magazine that, since being founded in 1909 by Pierre Monnatte, has been printed monthly and circulated to members of the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, more commonly known as the CGT, detailing union activities and responses to workplace disputes across France. The magazine also publishes *La Revue pratique de droit social* [*The Practical Review of Social Law*] (RPDS), a periodical publication that updates union members on changes to workplace laws and workers' rights. Today, NVO and RPDS have a large online presence, see: <https://nvo.fr/>.

²⁴² See: Sophie Duplaix, 'Objets de grève / objets de reflexion, suivi de 24 Objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène', *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'art Moderne* 71 (2000), 46-79.

supplement titled '*Documents: 30 Objets de grève*' being circulated in the French regional newspaper *Ouest-France* in October 2003.²⁴³ This difference in presentation, between the exhibiting of photographs in gallery and museum spaces to circulations of the photographs in publications, is crucial in attempting to understand the potential for 'relationality' embodied in the *objets de grève*, or to quote Bourriaud, in artworks creating 'possible encounters'.²⁴⁴ These different formats of the presentation of the *objets* therefore offer an opportunity for deliberation of *les relations interhumaines* that *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* can 'represent, produce or prompt'.²⁴⁵

The ways in which *Documents: 24* or *39 Objets de grève* are displayed inevitably impacts any potential interpretation of the objects themselves - whether they are viewed as objects, as 'art', as *documents* attesting to the histories of labour disputes, or something else entirely. To begin with it is useful to consider the *objets de grève* in their photographic formats. Here, the photographic formats refer to the photographs taken by Jean-Luc Moulène when presenting *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* at exhibitions at La Galerie in Noisy-le-Sec (1999), the Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain, La Petite-Rosselle in Forbach (2000), and at the Centre Pompidou in Paris (from 2003 onwards).²⁴⁶ Moulène's photographs of the *objets de grève* are all uniformly sized. In spite of the differences in the sizes of the objects depicted, from frying pans, to bobbins and boardgames, when displayed each print is 49 x 38cm. Often displayed in a grid like format and 'presented against uniform backdrops', *Documents: Objets de grève* have been described by critics as having 'an ambiguous appearance'.²⁴⁷ In part, the *objets*' 'ambiguity' is due to the nature in which the photographs were printed, with Moulène using Cibachrome, a photographic process in which multiple layers of dyes are applied to a specially designed polyester base that seals in the colours. Cibachrome's ability to 'seal' or 'stabilise' the dyes made it a popular medium for artists and photographers in the 1980s and 1990s looking to preserve the image clarity and colour purity of their work for as long as possible, something which also made Cibachrome a popular tool amongst archivists.²⁴⁸ When *Documents: 24 Objets de Grève* was first exhibited at La Galerie, a gallery in Noisy-le-Sec in

²⁴³ Verdier, p. 39. *Ouest-France* is a regional daily newspaper based in Rennes and Nantes which covers both local and national news. Founded in 1944, *Ouest-France* circulates in the north-west regions of France, in Brittany, Lower Normandy and the Pays de la Loire. See: Guy Delorme, *Ouest-France: histoire du premier quotidien français* (Rennes: Éditions Apogée, 2004).

²⁴⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 23.

²⁴⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 112.

²⁴⁶ La Galerie has since become La Galerie, centre d'art contemporain de Noisy-le-Sec.

²⁴⁷ Paulo Magagnoli, *Documents of Utopia: The Politics of Experimental Documentary* (Chichester; New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 108.

²⁴⁸ As has been argued, 'the coated material results in a brilliant final picture of an excellent stability against light exposure and under archival conditions'. See: Matthias Schellenberg, Ernst Riolo and Hartmut Blaue, 'Silver Dye-Bleach Photography', in *The Focal Encyclopaedia of Photography: Digital Imagine, Theory and Applications, History, and Science*, ed. by Michael R. Peres (Burlington, MA; Oxford: Elsevier Inc., 2007), pp. 700-711, (p. 701). Due to the rise in popularity of digital photography, in 2012 Cibachrome ceased large-scale production and is now only available on a by-request basis.

the eastern suburbs of Paris, they were displayed with very little in the way of contextual information on the wall or in the surrounding gallery space. This meant that viewers' wandering eyes had great difficulty in finding anything that could *clarify* what is it that they were observing. As art historian Paulo Magagnoli noted, 'it is only through understated captions – printed in the exhibition catalogue – that the viewer can learn about the singular history of the products'.²⁴⁹ In this sense, then, the *identity* or *history* of the strike objects could only be discerned through reading the supplementary exhibition material, although as Magagnoli went on to state, the text in the exhibition catalogue was overwhelming, 'appearing unnecessary and irrelevant'.²⁵⁰ This is a view echoed by fellow art historian Yve-Alain Bois, who suggested that the exhibition catalogues and captions give *Documents: 24 Objets de grève* 'an overtly documentary and slightly parodic tone'.²⁵¹ From these critiques, there are two issues which are raised: the first is the age-old question of the relationship between image and text, a question that semiologists and cultural theorists have puzzled over for centuries, and remains unsolved; the second question, then, after accepting the mutual interaction between the photographs of the *objets de grève* and their captions, is around the impact that these texts have on the perception of the artwork itself and also the extent to which socio-historical information is deemed 'necessary' to an interpretation of the *objets* themselves.²⁵²

No discussion of the act of photography, let alone post-war photographs of *objets de grève*, the majority of which were produced in France, would be complete without the work of Roland Barthes. Or, as critic and scholar Kristin Ross has noted, it is with Barthes that 'cultural studies *à la française* was born'.²⁵³ Barthes' writing on photography, from his earlier studies on the 'press-image' in *Image-Music-Text* to his later mediations on photography in *Camera Lucida*, remain key texts to those interested in this medium. Barthes' discussions of photography are complex. Whether attempting to establish a structuralist approach to analysing photography via semiotics, or considering the tactics of electoral photography, Barthes' writing on the subject veers in different directions, never quite offering a definitive account of *what* a photograph might *be*, or of photography's purpose(s), since to do so would be at odds with the 'the photographic paradox' of which he writes.²⁵⁴ Yet it is the mechanisms of photography – the technological capacity to 'mechanically repeat what could never be repeated existentially' – that, whilst seeming to offer the possibility of capturing 'a moment in

²⁴⁹ Magagnoli, p. 109.

²⁵⁰ Magagnoli, p. 109.

²⁵¹ Yve-Alain Bois, 'The Inventory of Solitudes', in *Jean-Luc Moulène*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Criqui, Yve-Alain Bois and Briony Fer (Cologne: König, 2009), pp. 94-106, (p. 100).

²⁵² For further reading on texts which problematise the question of the image-word dialectic see, for example: Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), and W. J. T. Mitchell, 'What do Pictures "Really" Want?', *October* 77 (1996), 71-82.

²⁵³ Kristin Ross, 'French Quotidian' in *The Art of the Everyday: The Quotidian in Postwar French Culture*, ed. by Lynn Gumpert (London; New York: New York University Press, 1997), 19-29, (p. 22).

²⁵⁴ See: Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, pp. 16-20.

time', presents issues of separating the photography as a physical object from that which it *represents*.²⁵⁵ As Barthes argues, 'photography has something tautological about it', meaning that a 'specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents), or at least it is not *immediately* or *generally* distinguished from its referent'.²⁵⁶ For Magagnoli, taking his cue from Barthes, Moulène's photographs are 'ambiguous'. One reason for this, Magagnoli argues, is that the photographs 'downplay the strike objects' difference from everyday commodities', resulting in images that 'resemble everyday commodities'.²⁵⁷ This is a view echoed by others, for example, art critic Anaël Pigeat has spoken of the *Objets de grève* series resembling 'advertisements,' and art historian Sophie Berrebi has described how the photographs 'surreptitiously evoke advertising posters'.²⁵⁸ It seems, then, that the photographs of the *objets de grève* are simultaneously vague and familiar – they are *representing* commodities, although the nature of these commodities as made outside of the elusive 'system' mentioned by LIP workers and Bourriaud alike, is unknown in the act of viewing the photographs *sans* captions. To clarify the latter portion of this statement, it is not to say that viewers attending Moulène's exhibitions would be unaware of recent labour history or the pertinence of the *objets de grève*, and to assume so would be unfair to the subjectivity of viewer experience.²⁵⁹ When viewing Moulène's photographs, though, it is evident that the *objets* depicted are *different* from those that would usually be advertised and consumed which can be noted through the altered colours or text; for example, the *Gauloises rouge* cigarettes appearing in a red, rather than customary blue packet [Fig. 5], or the appearance of a message on the underside of a frying pan 'Relaxe' ['Relax'], 'solidarité – liberté – justice – emploi' ['solidarity – freedom – justice – job']. However, in their photographic format, the presentation of the *objets de grève* relies on the spectator's pre-existing awareness of the ways in which *objets* are photographed, circulated and interpreted as a step in the process of production and consumption. If this is the case, then Magagnoli's earlier comments about the 'ambiguity' of

²⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), p. 4.

²⁵⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 5.

²⁵⁷ Magagnoli, p. 109; p. 110.

²⁵⁸ Anaël Pigeat, 'Jean-Luc Moulène: une œuvre quit fait image' in *artpress*, 388 (2012), 39-44, (p. 39);

²⁵⁹ Here, it is important to note that the 'not knowing' is not to be confused with ignorance. See, for example, Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*. In this text, Rancière argues that 'Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into each activity. It is our normal situation'. For Rancière, building on his earlier writing in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, the experience of the spectator cannot be defined by being 'taught', or by simply 'absorbing' the intentions of the artist. As he notes, there is space for subjectivity in experiencing artworks, since even though 'there is distance [...] between the idea of the artist and the sensation of comprehension of the spectator,' that this distance is occupied by something that is 'alien to both and to which they can refer to verify in common'. For Rancière, it is this that allows for dialogue and an equivalence of experiences to be shared, since the distance between artist and spectator subsists of 'meaning [that] is owned by no one', that 'excludes any uniform transmission,' of ideas and perceptions. See: Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2011), pp. 11-21.

the strike objects seems to be a fair assessment. His analysis echoes Barthes in considering that the photographs of the *objets de grève*, if perceived as 'everyday commodities' due to their staging and presentation, cannot be '*immediately or generally* distinguished from its referent', with the assumption here being that the photographs are *representing* commodities like any other.²⁶⁰

However, this 'ambiguity' is something which is a product of the photographs being displayed in a gallery setting. It is the displaying of these photographs in a gallery, *not* the photographs themselves, therefore, that can be described as 'ambiguous'. In many instances, the *objets de grève* photographed by Moulène were products that were widely recognised. It could be argued that the inversion of colours, subtle differences in fonts or texts, or changes to embroidery, would have caught the attention of the viewer if perceiving these as advertising posters, with such differences perhaps being attributed to rebranding, or the launching of new products. When displayed at La Galerie and the Centre Pompidou, the photographs are almost undoubtedly viewed as 'art'. The ways in which something is perceived is highly linked to the environment in which it is viewed. It is not so simple so as to suggest that a transplanting of an object from one space to another is enough to *transform* it, but the 'art' of photography is something often distinguished through its presence in institutional collections. This is not to say that a gallery or museum somehow *justifies* the status of photography as an art form, but wider societal attitudes towards museums, and the displaying of objects in such collections, help to maintain the notion that 'art occupies an elevated, autonomous realm'.²⁶¹ Yet, it is this environment which also opens up the opportunity for further interhuman relations to happen. Whilst the photographs themselves do not '*immediately or generally*' suggest that they are strike objects, the displaying of these *objets* within a gallery that provides the basis for the facilitation of 'relational' exchanges between artwork and spectators, or in this case, between the artist, striking workers and spectators. Although the absence of object labels and exhibition catalogues potentially obscures *les relations interhumaines* that were integral to the creation and circulation of the objects in the first place, this particular space dedicated to exhibitions of 'art' does offer flexibility in the scenarios for sociability that can be facilitated. In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud acknowledges the issues of 'relational' art existing in galleries, stating

²⁶⁰ Magagnoli, p. 110; Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 5.

²⁶¹ Rebecca J. Deroo, *The Museum Establishment and Contemporary Art: The Politics of Artistic Display in France after 1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 24. See, also, Pierre Bourdieu's *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*. In this text, Bourdieu builds on his sociological analyses of societal structures and experiences by relating this to the medium of photography, arguing that the usage of photography is often indicative of a person's *habitus*. Bourdieu discusses the distinction of photography as 'art' and its relationship to museums, arguing that 'All aesthetes at least agree in calling for a photographic museum, a consecrated place for the preservation of consecrated works, because this generic consecration would at least justify the ambition of aesthetic creation through photography'. See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, trans. by Shaun Whiteside (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 148-150.

'because they [relational artistic practices] are restricted to the space of galleries and art centres, they contradict the desire for sociability underpinning their meaning'.²⁶² So, even if the gallery setting 'restricts' the capacity for exchanges, through the unspoken codes that tend to govern behaviour within these spaces, there is still a possibility for the facilitation of 'relations'. As Bourriaud notes, 'the exhibition does not dent the social relationships in effect, but it does distort them and project them into a space-time frame encoded by the art system'.²⁶³ It is within this 'system', then, that 'relations' can still take place. Or, as art critic Emmanuelle Lequeux remarked upon viewing *Documents: 24 Objets de grève* at an exhibition in Nîmes, 'the museums almost end up constituting themselves as a history of countervailing powers [*contre-pouvoirs*], even if they are in the lap of power'.²⁶⁴ It is this context, too, and the ability of the photographs to be displayed in multiple settings, that also extends this potentiality for relations even further. For example, in 2000, *Documents: 39 Objets de grève* was exhibited at the Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain, La Petite-Rosselle in Forbach. In this exhibit, however, the photographs were accompanied by a selection of the *objets de grève*, displayed in glass vitrines. Here, it is interesting to note how the setting for the exhibition impacted the decision to *present* the photographs alongside objects. The Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain is based on the site of a former coal mine which eventually closed in 2001 after being in operation since 1856.²⁶⁵ The museum's collection is dedicated to the history of coal mining in the local area and across France, a focus that is reflected in the museum's permanent displays. The museum regularly hosts temporary exhibitions, and Moulène presented the photographs alongside his collection of *objets de grève* for the first time, in an exhibition titled '*Jean-Luc Moulène présentée Documents: 39 Objets de grève*' ['Jean-Luc Moulène presents: *Documents: 39 Strike Objects*']. In this instance, it appears that the museum, with its focus on offering a sociohistorical view of mining, seemed *more* interested in presenting both the photographs and the strike objects, since to do so provides the tangibility that the photographs, arguably, do not. Although critics compared Moulène's photographs to adverts, a medium which relies on representing the tangibility of objects to consumers to encourage the consumption of whatever might be being advertised, here, the physicality of the *objets de grève* seemed to highlight the preservation of the objects and their pertinence to *real* and very recent histories of worker activism. When displayed in a museum dedicated to the preserving

²⁶² Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 81-82.

²⁶³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 82.

²⁶⁴ Emmanuelle Lequeux, 'Jean-Luc Moulène à Nîmes: Le parti pris de la tangente', *Beaux Arts Mag*, 297 (2009), 70-75, (p. 75).

²⁶⁵ The Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain has since been renamed as the Musée Les Mineurs Wendel [The Wendel Miners Museum], Parc Explor Wendel. This museum is not the only of its kind, with many former mines across France being converted into museums and visitor centres of all different scales; see, for example: Musée de l'Ardoise, Renaze; Parc-Musée de la Mine, Saint-Étienne; and, Centre historique minier, Lewarde, amongst others.

the histories of an industry that was subject to its fair share of strike action, located in an area that experienced the harsh realities of mass unemployment due to the closing of heavy industries, the duality of *Documents: 39 Objets de grève* appearing both in photographic form with an accompanying catalogue, and the *actual objets de grève* that were photographed, offers a sense of reassurance that these are objects inherent to the (re)telling of social histories. If in the galleries of the Centre Pompidou *Documents: 24* or *39 Objets de grève* seemed 'ambiguous', the exhibition at the Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain, by contrast, offered clarity, demonstrating the pertinence of these works not only as 'art' objects, but as objects inherently rooted in the cultural and social fabric of French working life. The subjectivity of viewer experience cannot be measured, of course, but the difference in the focuses of the institutions hosting exhibitions of *Documents: 24* or *39 Objets de grève*, shapes the presentation and historicising of these photographs and objects. This is not to say that one exhibit was 'more successful' than the other, but simply that the perception of Moulène's photographs alters within each of its iterations.

At this point, it is useful to think about the 'relationality' of *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* in the context of its multiple appearances in print. The exhibiting of this series in gallery and museum spaces, as discussed, allows for the *objets de grèves* to be perceived as 'relational' 'art' objects in the most basic sense of Bourriaud's text. The *objets de grève* were, quite literally, created as a result of 'human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space'.²⁶⁶ Even if the spaces in which the strike objects were made are disputed (for example, considering LIP workers as employees of a 'private' enterprise), the intention behind their creation is rooted in raising wider awareness in public spheres of worker disputes. It is here, then, that the publication of *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* helps to further the idea of considering these 'non-relational' objects as 'relational'. Like with the first exhibition of Moulène's photographs, the first time the photographs and their captions appeared in anything other than an exhibition catalogue was in an issue of *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'art Moderne*, an academic journal based at the Centre Pompidou, the gallery that would later purchase Moulène's photographs. With the exhibition at the Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain came a newly formatted catalogue. The formatting of the exhibition catalogue, which featured the captions and contextual information about the strikes from which the *objets de grève* were produced, whilst deemed by Magagnoli as 'unnecessary', bore a close resemblance to *Énergie Charbon [Coal Energy]*, a magazine published by the Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain twice a year and circulated in the local communities and in wider social history networks. Although for critics judging the photographs in isolation at the Centre Pompidou, it was the staging of the photographs that gave the *objets de grève* a degree of

²⁶⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 113.

familiarity for resembling advertisements, for those viewing the photographs alongside the *objets de grève* at the Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain, it was the exhibition catalogue which provided a sense of the uncanny through utilising written formats that demonstrated a likeness to publication widely read and circulated in the local area.²⁶⁷ Two years later, when Moulène represented France in the 25th São Paulo biennale, another iteration of this project was created, this time titled *Documents: 30 Objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène*.²⁶⁸ Printed in a run of 100,000 copies, the catalogue was circulated across São Paulo and left in containers similar to those used for the distribution of free local newspapers. Of course, here, the *objets de grève* can be considered in a global, rather than local, context. In the first instance, the methods for circulation in São Paulo differed. If the publications were to be left in public spaces and available to take freely, there was a chance to create new opportunities for engagement between the artworks and audiences and create potential encounters. This task, however, is not as simple as stating that because the publication was free that *Documents: 30 Objets de grève* is 'relational'. This approach ignores the pertinence of considering the elements of cultural difference inherent to reading and perceiving the objects in this context. Given that the catalogues included Portuguese translations of the captions accompanying the objects, the limitations of Bourriaud's iteration of 'relational' art, which with a couple of exceptions exclusively featured the work of Western European artists, can be critiqued. To 'translate' is not the same as the act of (re)contextualising, and efforts were not made to present the objects in printed formats similar to those that had been altered for the assumed audiences at the Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain. In this sense, the audiences for this artwork were being *presented* with photographs of objects, in a format that would rely upon the translated captions for wider understanding of the objects themselves.²⁶⁹ As the art historian Renate Dohmen has asked in the wake of critiques of *Relational Aesthetics*, 'can relational art be redeemed and rearticulated to negotiate the kind of cultural encounters central

²⁶⁷ Moulène's work has been described as 'uncanny' on multiple occasions; for example, Magagnoli describes *Documents: 24 objets de grève* as having an 'uncanny effect'. The concepts of the uncanny here refers to Sigmund Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' (1919), in which he explores the idea of experiencing something that seems strangely familiar. In the context of the *objets de grève*, it is also useful to consider Rancière's discussion of the 'double effects' of 'political art'. Rancière argues that 'political art should create more than "awareness"', and instead focuses on how the uncanny can help to transmit the 'readability of signification'. See: Magagnoli, p. 109; Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (Chippenham: Penguin Classics, 2003); and, Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), pp. 62-64.

²⁶⁸ The 25th São Paulo biennale (2002) featured the work of 194 artists and was curated by German curator Alfons Hug. Centred around the theme of 'Metropolitan Iconographies', the biennale sought to consider how 'in metropolitan conditions, art does not only vie with architecture, but also with ally forms of cacophony and visual pollution'. See: Alfons Hug, ed., *25a Bienal de São Paulo – Países* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2002), p. 18.

²⁶⁹ *Gauloises* cigarettes, for example, were not on sale in Brazil and any knowledge of the brand could perhaps best be attributed to the company's sponsoring of motorsports teams.

to the global condition of contemporary art, or should it be considered a lost cause?'²⁷⁰ Whilst not 'relational' in the sense of being discussed by Bourriaud, in translating the captions and distributing *Documents: 30 Objets de grève présentées par Jean-Luc Moulène* via a medium akin to those of free newspapers, the reach of the strike objects in their printed forms grew, adding further weight to the argument that the *objets de grève* are inherently 'relational'. However, the project was not afforded the same level of local translation perhaps necessary for contextualisation (e.g. the publication *Documents: 30 Objets de grève présentées par Jean-Luc Moulène* did not resemble the layout of a free newspaper in São Paulo, only its distribution methods unlike previous iterations of the project).²⁷¹ The methods of distribution in São Paulo differed from those in France where the audience demographic for the publications of the *objets de grève* were invariably already known as consumers of art historical journals, trade union members and readers of regional newspapers. Back in France in 2003, on the occasion of the 47th Annual Congress of the CGT trade union, a special edition of *Quarante objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène [Forty Strike Objects presented by Jean-Luc Moulène]* was published and circulated to attendees of the conference, as well as to around 40,000 members of the union as a supplement to the issue of the union magazine *La Nouvelle Vie ouvrière (NVO)*.²⁷² For members of the CGT, the *objets de grève* would not necessarily have been anything they had not already seen before, since many of the objects were made by CGT members during various industrial disputes, however, the supplementary insert which collated the photographs offered readers a wider view of the histories of strike objects made. In October of the same year, *Ouest-France* published a version of Moulène's photographs. This time titled *Documents: 30 Objets de grève présentées par Jean-Luc Moulène*, the publication acted as a supplementary insert to an issue of the regional publication's daily newspapers. Interestingly, in its publication in *Ouest-France* there is yet another instance of the 'local' impacting the distribution of the images. With its base in Rennes and Nantes, *Ouest-France*, in the north-west of France, the readership of the newspaper was taken into account in the decision to publish the *Documents: 30 Objets de grève*. The areas covered in the

²⁷⁰ Dohmen, p. 19.

²⁷¹ Here, it is important to note that the term 'relational' is not being used as a synonym for 'migration' or 'cultural transference' and 'cultural difference'. Similarly, the 'global' is not being used in the same vein as rhetoric that exists surrounding the 'emancipatory' potential of globalisation. The act of translating the captions is not sufficient in levelling out the inequalities that exist between different cultural contexts, but rather can be seen as part of a wider change in what Papastergiadis and Mosquera describe as the 'changing function of art in a globalising world', where the 'position of the public has moved away from being passive receivers of information, and adopted [a] more active role as active co-producers and participants in the sharing of their own experience'. See: Nikos Papastergiadis and Berardo Mosquera, 'The Geopolitics of Contemporary Art', *Ibraaz*, 8 (2014), unpaginated <<https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/109>> [accessed 24 February 2019]. See, also: Gerardo Mosquera, 'The World of Differences: Notes about Art, Globalization, and Periphery', trans. by Kaira Cabañas, *Universes in Universes* <<http://universes-in-universe.de/magazin/marco-polo/e-mosquera.htm>> [accessed 24 February 2019].

²⁷² Verdier, p. 39.

newspaper, Brittany, Lower Normandy and the Pays de la Loire, are regions which previously relied on industries such as the mining of slate and coal, are no strangers to strike action, meaning that the potential consumers of the *objets de grève*, like those when displayed at the Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain, were prime candidates to take interest in the strike objects.²⁷³

This dislocation between that deemed ‘necessary’ by art critics is not only indicative of attitudes towards the presentation of the *objets de grève* alongside the photographs but also of the complexities inherent to *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* that still persist today. For now, it is worth revisiting *l’histoire* of *Chômageopoly*, presented earlier in this chapter. In spite of the significance of *l’affaire LIP* in French labour history, none of this information would be immediately obvious when looking at Moulène’s photograph of the boardgame [Fig. 6]. *Chômageopoly* featured in both iterations of Moulène’s *Documents: 24 Objets de grève* and *Documents: 39 Objets de grève*. The first exhibition to feature the work (at La Galerie) was composed of 24 photographs of strike objects taken against neutral backgrounds in natural light with minimal contextual information provided. This differs, though, from the presentation of the photographs and *objets de grève*. The displaying of the strike objects in glass vitrines – another instance of complicating the objects through presenting them as ‘museum’ exhibits – at the Musée du Bassin Houiller Lorrain, which allowed audiences to view details that were not visible in their photographic counterparts. In the case of *Chômageopoly*, a copy of the boardgame was displayed alongside its photograph. To a certain extent this provided a clearer view, however, its display in which the top and sides of the boardgame were visible, with the game pieces arranged alongside, meant that it did not clearly state that the workers who created this were part of the LIP strikes of the 1970s since this information was on the underside of the packaging. Although the statement declaring that the boardgame had been made by LIP workers was obscured from view in both the photographic and physical views of the object, this presentation provided a chance for viewers to see close up details of particular elements required to play the boardgame; for example, the inverted ‘banknotes’ that players collected to accumulate ‘support for their cause’ rather than denominations of monopoly

²⁷³ Kristin Ross, for example, writes of the histories of strike action in Brittany during the 1960s and in the build up to May ’68. See: Ross, *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, pp. 213-216. This targeting of particular newspaper audiences for printed supplements is a common theme running throughout Moulène’s work; for example, in his 2005 work, *Le Monde, Le Louvre*. Here, Moulène arbitrarily chose 24 items from the object stores of the Louvre, Paris and, like his *Objets de grève* series, photographed these objects against a plain background. These photographs were then collated and published in a supplement for the French newspaper *Le Monde*. This supplement, however, was not circulated nationally, and just 50,000 copies were distributed as part of the Île-de-France edition of *Le Monde* dated 30th November, 2005. See: Le Louvre, ‘Jean-Luc Moulène: *Le Monde, Le Louvre*, Communiqué de presse’, *Le Louvre* (2005) <https://www.louvre.fr/sites/default/files/medias/medias_fichiers/fichiers/pdf/louvre-communique-pressejean-luc-moulenele.pdf> [accessed 12 February 2019].

money.²⁷⁴ The same, too, can be said of another of the strike objects, this time a small pair of leather shoes that were made during the mass strikes of 1995. In Moulène's photograph of this object [Fig. 7], a small pair of red and black leather shoes, similar in size to a pair of baby booties, are photographed against a plain background. Upon seeing the photograph, assumptions might be made about the potential wearer of these shoes and how they came to be photographed. As with *Chômageopoly*, the crucial information about how these objects relate to strikes cannot be seen in Moulène's photograph and, upon closer inspection of the object, viewers would be able to see the union abbreviation 'CGT' embroidered on the inner ankle of the boots [Fig. 8]. Upon closer inspection, a small note on a piece of scrunched up paper can be found in one of the shoes. Although the information on this is incomplete, owing to the age of the paper and its inevitable wear and tear, striking workers who made the shoes included details of how many orders had been intercepted by workers during the strikes of 1995; at the time of making, twelve orders had been intercepted – alongside the production targets that workers were expected to fulfil during their normal working hours – factories were expected to produce 3,000 pairs of shoes a day and a total of 54,000 per month.²⁷⁵ Whilst this information is dependent upon interacting with the objects 'in person', something which in and of itself relies on communicating and arranging appointments with archivists, doing so allows for the viewing of a further embroidered inscription which reads 'Les Myrys 5' [Fig. 8]. *La Société Myrys*, like many other companies, saw its employees participate in the strikes from November-December 1995. It was during these strikes that these shoes [*souliers*] were made for the first time by workers occupying factories.²⁷⁶ As was the case with *Chômageopoly*, production of the shoes continued even after strike action had ended to continue raising funds for unions by being 'sold during sporting events, demonstrations and union gatherings held on May 1st in 1996 and 1997' to celebrate *La Fête du Travail* [International Workers' Day].²⁷⁷ In the context of viewing the photographs of *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* as 'relational', then, the exhibiting of the photographs alongside the strike objects themselves offers a further avenue of engagement, and in creating new 'possible encounters', with the captions being vital to the interpretation of these objects via their various printed mediums.

²⁷⁴ Sophie Berrebi, 'Jean-Luc Moulène's Dialectical Documents', *Papers of Surrealism*, 7:7 (2007), 1-12, (p. 7).

²⁷⁵ Roubaix, Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, 2003 025 009 – *Objets de grève – Objets divers, quatre paires de souliers de la lutte en cuir*, 1995.

²⁷⁶ Leyris, unpaginated.

²⁷⁷ Leyris, unpaginated.

Being Documents

Since the late 1970s, much of Moulène's artistic practice has been rooted in photography.²⁷⁸ The photographs vary across subjects, from strike objects, to people, to commodities and urban areas, but there is a tendency for Moulène to photograph subjects in series or at different intervals. The description of these photographs can be difficult to understand since Moulène classifies these artworks as 'documents', which is reflected in the titles of the works themselves; for example, *Documents: 24 Objets de grève* (1999), *Documents: Produits de Palestine* ['Documents: Palestine Products'] (2002-4), and *Documents: Les filles d'Amsterdam* ['Documents: Amsterdam Girls'] (2004).²⁷⁹ To begin with, then, it is useful to discuss the objects and photographs together within the context of them first being exhibited as *documents* at La Galerie, under the title *Documents: 24 Objets de grève*. Both the objects and photographs *document* a particular event, whether that be the specific contexts in which the objects were conceived or the moment that the photographs were taken as part of larger photographic series. In this sense the description of the *24 Objets de grève* as *documents* seems apt. Yet this term adds confusion to the interpretation of the work itself and the status of the *documents* as markers of specific moments in *history*. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault examines the history of ideas and the ways in which knowledge has come to be understood as some sort of 'whole' entity in an effort to justify singular narratives of *history*. Throughout the text, Foucault pays close attention to the temporal dispersion that notions of *history* often ignore, usually through a determination to relay events of the past as some sort of linear, progressive trajectory based on a series of loosely connected continuities. As Foucault notes, 'nothing would be more pleasant, or more inexact, that to conceive of [history] as [...] a great, unmoving, empty figure that irrupted one day on the surface of time, that exercised over men's thought a tyranny that none could escape'.²⁸⁰ Yet, to understand history in such a format overlooks the temporal nuances and complexities that have conditioned and shaped the ways in which histories have been written and understood, leading Foucault to question the writing of the archive. Or, of exploring the various ways in which *statements* become *documents*, that then become *history*.

When offering an account of *history*, the first place that a historian may visit is the archive; a place steeped in *history* through its commitment to preserving documents and

²⁷⁸ When asked how he first became interested in photography, Moulène tends to provide interviewers with an anecdote from his childhood, often telling them about a sandcastle building competition that he participated in one summer where the first prize was a camera, and the second prize was a model of a Renault, 'the car of the 1960s'. Moulène came joint first in the competition and was rewarded with the model car, thus instigating his desire to start taking photographs. One version of this can be found in: Anaël Pigeat, 'Jean-Luc Moulène: une œuvre qui fait image' in *artpress*, 388 (2012), 39-44, (p. 40).

²⁷⁹ See: Jean-Luc Moulène, *Documents* (New York: Sequence Press, 2016).

²⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 144.

artefacts from years past. Though, as Foucault argues, the archive is 'the general system of the formation and transformation of statements'.²⁸¹ This suggests that the archive is a process, rather than a place, a process which collects and preserves statements considered to be pertinent at a particular moment in time for those at some point in the future. Therefore, the collecting of statements, in their various guises that come to constitute 'archival material', become the places, moments, or 'statement-events' to use Foucault's vocabulary, in which history *happened* or continues to *happen*. In reconsidering the archive as a process rather than place, Foucault presents the archive as 'the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events'.²⁸² Through the process of archiving *statements* the formalisation of history and undertaking of historical analysis comes to rely on historians navigating a series of sources or *documents* in which history is to be found and traced. Echoing these ideas, Michel de Certeau focuses on this issue, too, in his 1975 study of historiography, *The Writing of History*. Here, de Certeau argues that 'in history everything begins with the gesture of setting aside, of putting together, of transforming certain classified objects into '*document*'.²⁸³ In this sense, then, the practice of writing *history* becomes a process of piecing together prescribed *documents* that, simultaneously, work together to *document* the statement-events encapsulated in the documentary material that make up what is understood as the archive. These documents are subsequently used in such a way that support Foucault's idea that 'history is expended on material documentation (books, texts, accounts, registers, acts, buildings, institutions, laws, techniques, objects, customs, etc.) that exists in every time and place, in every society'.²⁸⁴ If contemporary history seeks answers and storylines in *documents*, then the narratives woven around these sources are also subject to a complicated set of relations between the objects and the context in which a particular history of objects is being constructed. If the archive is to be considered as a process which sets aside and gives *place* to potential histories, this is only possible as a result of the process which precedes that of *statements* being transformed into *documents* through being set aside and distinguished for their abilities to condense events past.

So, if in contemporary iterations of history there is, as Foucault argues, 'a lively curiosity shown for documents or for traces left behind by time,' then how might this be understood in the case of Moulène's *Documents: 24 and 39 Objets de grève* series?²⁸⁵ The

²⁸¹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 146. Foucault defines a statement as something made up of 'laws of possibility, rules of existence for the objects that are named, designated, or described within it, and for the relations that are affirmed or denied in it'. p. 103.

²⁸² Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 146.

²⁸³ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 72.

²⁸⁴ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 7.

²⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2002) p. 402.

title of the work contains the term *document*, thus suggesting that the project as a whole has some form of historical pertinence. Such a view has been upheld by some art critics; for example, when discussing the *Objets de grève* series in *artpress*, Evence Verdier argued that the work ‘records a form of expression that history should remember’.²⁸⁶ Here, the usage of the term ‘should’ [*doit*] is interesting since it only serves to reinforce the notion that there are specific processes in place that come to shape the narratives of history. Thus, the creation of *documents* highlights the emphasis placed on transforming ‘statement-events’ into historical sources from which such narratives can begin being composed. As another art critic noted when discussing Moulène’s work, ‘no “document” is accidentally found, but is instead always willingly constructed as such by the historian through her/his practice’.²⁸⁷ The use of the term *document* in the artwork’s title seems to pre-empt its almost inevitable classification and cataloguing in some form of archive, whether that be the archive of the artist, the gallery which owns the work, or an archive containing the strike objects. The status and location of the artwork are, therefore, paramount to the artwork’s inception as the *Objets de grève* series. In encompassing multiple locations and spaces, such as the different locations and disputes in which the objects were made, the studio in which the photographs were taken and the archives in which they can be found today which, in turn, *objets de grève* are afforded a space in *history*. As de Certeau argues, the creation of knowledge and history through ascribing meaning and places to *documents* is based on the processes of ‘copying, transcribing, or photographing these objects,’ which results in ‘simultaneously changing their locus and their status’.²⁸⁸ In collecting and photographing the *objets de grève*, Moulène’s work operates on multiple levels through its altering and recreation of these objects. At the same time, though, there is a level of ambiguity present, as Magagnoli noted, in the artwork through the forms of the objects themselves, and in the effort to reproduce images of the objects through the medium of photography with little in the way of explication when the photographs are displayed. The multiplicity of locations and spaces that these photographs represent remain anonymous, as does their reasoning for being considered *documents* of history. The objects and photographs alike err between *documenting* specific moments and spaces in history whilst also acting and *becoming documents* themselves, a process that is only amplified by the title of the series itself. In this regard, the idea of *documents* attempting to offer a narrative according to relations between objects is evident in the work’s title and in the relationships established between the

²⁸⁶ Verdier, p. 40. Here, Verdier writes: ‘*Documents/Objets de grève témoigne de l’une des multiples modalités de parole doit l’histoire doit aussi tenir compte*’. In this instance *doit* has been translated as ‘should’ rather than ‘must’.

²⁸⁷ Sophie Berrebi, ‘Documents, Monuments, and Photographs: Jean-Luc Moulène with Michel Foucault’ in *Foucault on the Arts and Letters: Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Catherine M. Soussloff (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd., 2016), pp. 45-62, (p. 52).

²⁸⁸ de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, p. 73.

objects collected and photographed; for example, all of the objects were made by workers on strike and photographed in order to be exhibited together as part of a series. To this extent, it could be argued that the *documents*, through already being related in subject and the medium used, enable the works to exist as both individual (e.g., a single photograph of one of the objects), and collective entities (e.g. in exhibitions and publications).

The process of creating or *becoming documents* is complicated further because this is not the endpoint for the sources now ascribed a space in potential history-making. In setting aside a specific space for the *objets de grève* through the act of *documenting* them, the issue of how such objects are remembered enters the fray. In his account of historiography, de Certeau follows Foucault, arguing that the ‘document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally *memory*,’ and that ‘history is one way in which a society recognises and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked’.²⁸⁹ The act of *making* history, therefore, relies on the attributing of memories or connections to documentation to make the connections required for forming historiographical narratives. In this formation, the emphasis alters what Foucault describes as a ‘traditional form’ of history, one which ‘undertook to ‘memorise’ the *monuments* of the past’ and ‘transform them into *documents*’, into a contemporary formation of history where ‘history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*’.²⁹⁰ Unlike *documents*, which can support the historian’s endeavours in helping to shape or sustain pre-existing narratives, for Foucault, *monuments* exist within a sort of temporal vacuum as entities that are ‘inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past’.²⁹¹ *Monuments* in a traditional sense, then, can be considered as relics of times past. That is to say that *monuments* once took on meaning and became pertinent to *history* only after *documents* that could impose a particular narrative had been sourced and written, or, as Foucault notes, monuments ‘attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse’.²⁹² But, if in a contemporary conception of history *documents* are transformed into *monuments*, it is the particular objects, relics or spaces once considered empty of meaning or relevance that come to encompass the *histories* which are written about them. Just as the *documents* of the *objets de grève* series’ title causes confusion through its possible meanings and ambiguities, so too does the idea of the *document* becoming *monument*, since it raises further questions surrounding the temporal and spatial characteristics of the objects themselves. If a *monument* is to exist in a timeless state representing a past to which there are no ties, then how is it that the *Documents: 24 and 39 Objets de grève* can act as both *document* and *monument* simultaneously? Not only does the

²⁸⁹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 7.

²⁹⁰ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp. 7-8.

²⁹¹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 8.

²⁹² Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 8.

title of the work complicate the objects (both the strike objects and photographs individually and collectively) and their status as *documents* and *monuments of and to history*, but, also of their location within the writing and interpretation of the events from which they emerged, as well as for the connections formed between the objects as a result of being born from similar circumstances.

Documents for and to whom?

When discussing the *Objets de grève* series critics have likened the photographs to ‘identity photographs’.²⁹³ In a formal sense, it could be argued that these objects or *documents* are akin to ‘identity’ photographs since the objects are photographed against neutral backgrounds in a format similar to those taken for official identification purposes. In this sense, the photographs of the strike objects are also reminiscent of archival photographs or those used to document museum and gallery collections. The neutral backgrounds highlight the centrality of the objects themselves both as archival objects and as the main subjects of the photographs. Yet, if the objective of the *objets de grève* series is to *document* these images then this assumes that the objects themselves are considered as articles that are *worthy* of being recorded, presumably for preservation and the perusal of future generations in the various locations and processes associated with archives. As the art historian Sophie Berrebi has argued, the *objets de grève* can be thought of as ‘an ongoing project that is both a document of social history and an art project’.²⁹⁴ Herein lies one of the issues at the heart of the *Objets de grève* series, since it is the overarching understanding of disciplinary boundaries that imply that Moulène’s work straddles both the fields of ‘social history’ and ‘art’. This explicit definition between disciplinary fields furthers the issue of space and location of the objects and their interpretation. Whilst the project as a whole is posited as a cross-disciplinary affair, it is interesting to consider the whereabouts of the project after its consolidation into a photographic series. At present, the various components of the project are scattered; the strike objects are in the collection of the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail in Roubaix, whilst the photographs taken by Moulène are part of the permanent collection of the Centre Pompidou in Paris. This separation of the components amplifies the disjuncture between what is understood as ‘social history’ and ‘art’, but also of the *identities* and *spaces* of the objects and photographs, and of the *identities* and *spaces* that these components may represent. If these *documents* have become *monuments*, then it is worth thinking about *to* and *for* whom and for what *purposes* the *Objets de grève* come to represent in their preservation and display,

²⁹³ Berrebi, ‘Jean-Luc Moulène’s Dialectical Documents’, p. 7.

²⁹⁴ Berrebi, ‘Jean-Luc Moulène’s Dialectical Documents’, p. 7.

whether that be from their initial exhibiting at La Galerie or later publication as a supplement for *NVO* and *Ouest-France*.

This idea of an 'identity' places the objects in a precarious position, though, since it raises questions surrounding *whose* or *what* identities are being depicted or presented in these objects and how they come to represent particular social spaces within society. In thinking through the questions that arise from this, it is worth considering the extent to which the *Objets de grève* embody both collective and individual histories or narratives. As discussed in relation to Foucault's work, it is unproductive to think of these objects and photographs as representing a singular narrative of history and so the efforts which ensue to ascribe some form of meaning and pertinence to the *objets de grève* is posited as a potential amongst many possibilities. Here, the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is useful in problematising the *objets* due to his emphasis on how collective identities might be understood in terms of 'social trajectories' in the wider context of the habitus that they embody. For Bourdieu, the concept of habitus was born out of his study of the French education system in which he found that, due to inculcated ideas about social status and their position within society, the children of working-class parents generally failed to thrive in this particular environment when compared with the performances of their middle and upper-class peers. From his studies Bourdieu concluded that the education system reproduces social structures that, in turn, reproduce ideas of classifications within society that distinguish particular social groups from others. The 'habitus' that Bourdieu describes is informed by his earlier work on 'cultural capital', the idea that individuals possess non-financial social assets that inform their standing in society (e.g., mannerisms, skills, clothing, material belongings, etc.) with these things contributing towards feeling a sense of collective identity, or as Bourdieu states, feeling that there are "'people like us'".²⁹⁵ Habitus, therefore, represents 'an objective relationship between two objectivities,' which 'enables an intelligible and necessary relation to be established between practices and a situation, the meaning of which is produced by the habitus through categories of perception and appreciation that are themselves produced by an observable social condition'.²⁹⁶ In this sense, habitus acts as a mediator between which relations are established and can be understood sociologically. As Bourdieu states, habitus encourages the need to 'think relationally', meaning that interpreting particular phenomena as the products of, and related to, other phenomena is necessitated by the existing links between the phenomena in question.²⁹⁷ It is through 'thinking relationally' and establishing these links that comparisons can be made *between*, rather than *to*, phenomena, resulting in

²⁹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 517.

²⁹⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 95.

²⁹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Introduction to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 234.

commonalities being identified that allow for the study of habitus in social contexts. In Bourdieu's analysis, the conditions and mannerisms that inform habitus are largely related to social class. Bourdieu expands on this further when discussing 'taste' whereby he concludes that the habitus of social groups can be assumed according to examining consumption patterns of particular peoples and their relationship to cultural and economic capital.²⁹⁸ Given the usage of habitus explaining particular social structures, it is worth probing the questions that arise from the *spaces* which the *Objets de grève* now occupy, both within the contexts of social and art histories and the individual and collective histories can they now represent. These multiple spaces for such histories, or 'spaces of possible', to use Bourdieu's term, are vital in understanding how the *objets* can come to be representative of collective efforts. In this context, then, studying how the *objets* come to embody workers' struggles and the appropriation of the means of production, whilst also being indicative of a work of art understood and interpreted as the product of an artist's labour.

So, how do the *objets de grève*, in the spaces that they inhabit, represent identities in collective sense? At the time of writing, the objects reside at the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, a national archive that specialises in collecting documents and objects related to the 'the working world' and have done for the past two decades. More specifically, the endeavours of the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail involve preserving items generally concerned with working-class history in France, ranging from union documents, tools and objects relating to mining, rail and cleaning industries to vast records of local and national banking history. The archives have a history of intervening in industrial disputes in order to preserve these histories, or to enable *documents* to one day become *monuments*. For example, *during l'affaire LIP*, archivists later associated with the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail cooperated with striking workers to ensure that paperwork and documents relating to strike action would not be destroyed by management in the event that the company was liquidated, thus 'distorting the whole heritage' of the movement.²⁹⁹ The whole 'heritage'

²⁹⁸ Bourdieu notes an important distinction between how the concept of taste differs depending on the social classes and peoples being discussed from previous attempts to theorise and understand taste. Bourdieu opposes the Kantian notion of taste which argues in favour of a universal aesthetic that understands the recognition of taste and beauty as a product of a shared ability to acknowledge and make judgements of taste. For Bourdieu, judgements of taste are informed by class structures, with the 'bourgeois taste' of the dominant classes shaping what is considered of 'good taste' within wider society. In his analysis, Bourdieu highlights how the material conditions of particular peoples alter the ways in which taste is perceived; for example, Bourdieu notes that within a bourgeois context, the notion of taste relates to having the freedom to make choices about the material goods being consumed due to economic privilege, hence the idea of people having a 'taste for luxury'. This, however, is in stark contrast to the habitus and 'taste of necessity' which Bourdieu links to the material conditions that place restrictions over the items made available for consumption. See: Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 171-176.

²⁹⁹ Louis Le Roc'h Morgère, 'Les Archives du Monde du Travail avant les AMNT', in *Au Fil Des Archives: Le travail c'est tout un monde!*, ed. by Martine Le Roc'h Morgère (Carpique: Imprimerie Malherbe, 2014), pp. 3-9, (p. 7).

and its subsequent preservation is largely linked to social class, something which further complicates the status of the *objets de grève* in their current location when attempting to understand them in a wider context. An argument can be made that the *objets* themselves, in their physical format as *documents*, or *monuments* to follow Foucault's line of enquiry, represent multiple possibilities and spaces of history. When looking at the strike objects themselves, on a very basic level it can be argued, then, that, whether they be *Chômageopoly*, leather boots, or cigarette packets, that they can represent a collective identity. The *objets* were born out of the need to share news and increase support for groups of striking workers, so the names of individuals seem irrelevant because the objects are the results of the labour and efforts of many, with this sentiment often being mentioned on the objects themselves.³⁰⁰ As has already been described, *Chômageopoly* was the result of a collective effort between striking LIP workers and workers at other occupied factories across France; in the *International Herald Tribune* that is free of photographs, the empty spaces are representative of collective strike action by multiple photo-engravers who rallied to support a retoucher whose hours had been cut; in *CHAIX: la lutte par l'affiche* [CHAIX: the struggle by poster], 85 illustrators contributed poster designs and illustrations in support of ongoing industrial action at the Chaix printworks.³⁰¹ When viewing the strike objects individually it is clear that they are the product of collective efforts and struggles and so each object, therefore, represents a collective identity or combined efforts to overcome disputes in the workplace. This is the common thread amongst the strike objects which share similar histories in the circumstances and conditions in which they were created being the reasoning as to why they were eventually collected and photographed together by Moulène. As Maganoli has argued, 'despite their differences, they all stand for the workers' appropriation of the means of production'.³⁰² Yet, in spite of these

³⁰⁰ For example, the underside of the boxes for *Chômageopoly* featured the information: 'ce jeu a été conçu et réalisé par les travailleurs de LIP' [this game was designed and made by LIP workers], the boots were embroidered with the letters 'CGT' to represent the union on strike, and the Gauloises cigarette packets, made by striking workers during an industrial dispute in 1982, feature the 'CGT' union acronym alongside the statement 'fabriquées par les travailleurs en lutte' [made by workers on strike]. See: Roubaix, Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, 2003 025 008 – Objets de grève – Objets divers, *Un paquet de cigarette "Gauloises" rouge, la "Pantinoise" – 1982*.

³⁰¹ Roubaix, Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, 2003 025 001 – Objets de grève – Objets en papier, *Chaix: la lutte par l'affiche*– 36 affiches réalisées par 85 dessinateurs: recueil de 76 pages, 40 x 27.5 cm, couverture en papier cartonné rouge, pages en papier glacé, 1975-1981. See also: Jean-Luc Moulène: *Opus 1995-1997* (Paris: Éditions Léo Scheer, 2008), p. 106; p. 114-6. The Chaix printworks in Saint-Ouen, Paris, played a key role in the printing and circulation of materials during May '68. In 1975, management proposed 410 redundancies out of a workforce of 640 which led to workers voting to strike and occupy the printworks. This was a longstanding industrial dispute that lasted until 1981 when a new company was launched onsite following the sale of the premises by the owners. See: Pierre Tropol, 'Luttes de l'imprimerie Chaix: Remise en route des machines. Saint-Ouen', *L'Humanité*, 13th November 1978, and Guillaume Soulez, 'What's left of the 'red suburb'? Hervé Le Roux's *Reprise* as a case study', in *Screening the Paris Suburbs: From the Silent Era to the 1990s*, ed. by Philippe Met and Derek Schilling (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 202-212, (pp. 204-6).

³⁰² Magagnoli, p. 108.

similarities, the authorship of the *objets* themselves remain tied to multiple histories and parties.

In the first instance it is useful to consider how spaces of collective histories can be implemented in a wider context. For Bourdieu, the shared behaviours that are recognised as habitus are a product of the social spaces in which they take place and are referred to as 'fields'. These fields are indicative of areas in society in which social groupings can be distinguished owing to the tastes or habits that they may share, an idea that is central to his 1984 publication *Distinction*.³⁰³ Fields, whilst existing to demarcate different cultural, social and, amongst others, ideological spheres, highlight the links that can be used to explain the interrelated nature of society and its peoples. Although Bourdieu discusses fields in a manner that makes them seem autonomous; for example, discussing how tastes and habitus manifest themselves in fashion, art and theatre, respectively, as distinct from one another, there are common threads between fields. Bourdieu argues that society operates on the basis of thinking relationally, meaning that fields allow for connections to be made between what might at first seem disparate factions through examining how the level of capital, whether that be cultural or economic, impacts the peoples that occupy particular fields according to their habitus. For Bourdieu, then, habitus, fields and capital become 'in a sense the objectifications of the social relationship in which they are produced and function'.³⁰⁴ These factors of Bourdieu's theory, therefore, not only relate to the material and contextual conditions in which they were produced, but also to each other, or as Bourdieu scholar John Girling notes, 'capital of whatever kind, Bourdieu argues, is a 'social relationship' since 'it only operates in relation to others'.³⁰⁵ It is within these fields, though, that spaces emerge for the writing of collective histories. If the habitus, tastes and fields are spaces which are shared by particular peoples, peoples for whom a position in society is assigned, or informed by overarching societal and ideological apparatuses, these then become what Bourdieu describes as 'spaces of possible'.

³⁰³ The usage of the term 'field' is key here since when Bourdieu was writing he referred to 'fields' as *les champs*, meaning 'field of knowledge' or 'an area', rather than the more conventional term used for an actual physical space of fields, *les prés*. Bourdieu first used the term 'field' in a special issue of *Les Temps Modernes* titled 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur', published in 1966, that explored the 'field' of artistic production and literary criticism in the French historical tradition. The concept of 'field' is one that became of increasing centrality to Bourdieu's studies, particularly in the 1970s and 1990s in his studies of education, television and housing, with him later applying to term when writing about his own life story, or 'social trajectory'. See: Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1977), pp. 17-22; Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television*, trans. by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (New York: The New Press, 1998), pp. 1-8; 39-44; and, Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, trans. by Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 33-39. See also: Patricia Thomson, 'Field' in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. by Michael Grenfell (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 65-81.

³⁰⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 223.

³⁰⁵ John Girling, *Social Movements and Symbolic Power: Radicalism, Reform and the Trial of Democracy in France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 43.

The 'spaces of possible' of which Bourdieu writes refer to the potentialities that exist in the suggested fields within society. When explaining this concept, Bourdieu was concerned with the field of cultural production, focusing specifically on the production, circulation and consumption of what he described as 'symbolic goods'; commodities that 'constitute one of the key markers of 'class' and also the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction'.³⁰⁶ Whilst Bourdieu's studies revolve around the analysis of specific goods in relation to social class, he was eager to highlight that there was no *singular* history that could be determined through the study of an object existing in its particular field alone. Thus, the spaces and histories ascribed to such objects become 'spaces of possible' in the sense of pertaining to and requiring an extensive study of context to be understood. In a practical sense, and relating to Bourdieu's own sociological methodologies, this means that in order to examine objects in spaces of possible and think about them relationally, it is necessary to undertake a 'radical contextualisation'.³⁰⁷ This process involves not only studying the objects or artwork in relation to the spaces and fields in which they exist, but also the 'producers of works in terms of their strategies and trajectories, based on their individual and class habitus', alongside analysing the way in which the field is itself structured and how it was shaped so as to be understood in its contemporary formation – including examining structures that perpetuate social reproduction.³⁰⁸ These spaces of possible are, therefore, indicative of relations not only between individuals or objects operating in particular fields, but also of relations between fields across society, with each field and habitus being informed and shaped according to the ideological structures that exist. Spaces of possible are a product of, and come to represent, collective efforts that lead to associations and connections being made between individuals (or 'individual agents' as Bourdieu terms them) in society. It is within these spaces of possible and their embodiment of the interrelations between fields that there are opportunities for multiple histories to be written and perceived. In the same way that Foucault probes the notion of history-making by questioning *who* and *how* history is written, collated and shared, Bourdieu, too, argues that there are dangers in writing a history that is removed from the context of which it is a product. Whilst Foucault calls for historians to be aware of their roles in writing what can be perceived as one of many multiple histories through their consultation of *documents*, Bourdieu invites historians to recognise their work as a collective endeavour in

³⁰⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 59.

³⁰⁷ Randal Johnson, 'Editor's Introduction', in *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. by Randal Johnson and Pierre Bourdieu (Cambridge; Oxford: Polity Press and Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1993), pp. 1-27 (p. 9).

³⁰⁸ Johnson, p. 9.

which the relationships between fields across contemporary societies and those by which they are informed are contextualised.³⁰⁹

With this in mind, the issue of ‘authorship’ and ‘ownership’ can be raised when discussions of the *objets de grève*. Although difficult to answer, it is worth asking the question as to *who* do the *objets de grève* represent and *who* is responsible for their histories? This is a question which, in the most basic sense of the term, might be solved through the different locations in which the strike objects can be found. At the Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, the objects are categorised as being ‘presented by Jean-Luc Moulène’ and, although it is Moulène’s photographs of the objects that are present in the archives’ records, in no way is it Moulène who is ascribed as their ‘author’. This is in contrast to the photographs that were bought by the Centre Pompidou in 2003 which, when displayed, and even though Moulène does not proclaim to be the ‘author’ of these images, it is his name which appears on the object labels, and it is his name that becomes a marker of the supposed *pertinence* of *Documents*. Maybe this settles the question; the *objets de grève* remain the product of numerous anonymous workers whilst the photographs are the product of the artist. However, this becomes problematic when thinking about habitus, since the objects that were the product of one habitus (e.g., the *objets de grève* being created by the ‘working-classes’) now become the property of the middle classes in their ‘artistic’ format (e.g., through the assumption of the demographics of visitors to galleries according to Bourdieu’s analysis). To make this assumption of ascribing the different forms of the *objets de grève* according to the habitus inscribed by social hierarchies (for example, describing something as ‘working-class’) ignores the nuances of experiences that come to embody individual and collective identification with certain classes, which perhaps renders the concept of habitus redundant.³¹⁰ Yet, in attempting

³⁰⁹ This is also present in another aspect of Bourdieu’s later work when discussing the concept of ‘social trajectories’. In opposition to the idea of ‘life histories’, which he argued were concerned with biographies and individual experiences, Bourdieu favoured the study of ‘social trajectories’ for focusing on the shared commonalities that people experience during their life as a result of their habitus and the fields which they occupy. For Bourdieu, ‘social trajectories reflect collective histories’ and avoid the tropes of life histories that he argued were concerned with the individual, and usually presented a linear trajectory of a person’s life in terms of ‘progress’ or ‘passage’. The idea of social trajectories as ‘collective’ rather than ‘individual’ has, however, been contested for its ignorance towards the practices and experiences of the individual agent. However, the concept of ‘social trajectories’ are at odds with formulations of histories and narratives elsewhere in French critical theory; for example, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that histories are non-linear and, instead, formed according to the interrelatedness of different points, creating a map-like structure. See: Bourdieu and Nice, *Sketch for Self-Analysis*, pp. 37-38; Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 22-25; and, Timothy Barrett, ‘Storying Bourdieu: Fragments Toward a Bourdieusian Approach to “Life Histories”’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, (2015), 1-10, (pp. 4-6); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London; New York: Continuum, 2004).

³¹⁰ The complexities of habitus and social class have been explored elsewhere in French culture, particularly in contemporary autobiographical literature or *écriture de soi* [self-writing]. Such works are often interpreted under the rubric of ‘autofiction’, a term coined by French author Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 when referring to his own novel *Fils* as a fictionalised autobiography. Annie Ernaux discusses

to offer a social history of the *objets de grève*, which are complicated further through their photographing by Moulène, the contradictions of this process are brought to the fore. Not only is there no singular narrative that can be credited to the *objets de grève*, but so too, is there no *correct* way of approaching this history. To ignore the social situation in which the strike objects were created, and the identities, whether anonymous or collective, of their makers is to obscure their potential histories, and the 'fields' that they may occupy. This is an issue which T. J. Clark problematises in his study of Gustave Courbet's involvement in the 1848 revolution. Here, Clark argues that there are many factors involved in attempting to put forth a social history of art, from the reception of artworks by critics, the economic conditions of the artist, to the 'intuitive analogies between form and ideological content'.³¹¹ Inevitably, it is not just the artist or the maker that becomes 'responsible' for the work, and the institutions in which the *objets* find themselves today play their role in *preserving* elements which will later contribute towards the potential histories that will be written in the 'spaces of possible'. In the same way that the *objets de grève* have no concrete authors, of which there is no need if following Barthes assertion of the 'death of the author', the various social formations, classes, habitus, and fields are all at play in a presentation, or positioning of, *Documents: 24 or 39 Objets de grève*. As Clark proposes, it is useful to offer 'a history of mediations', a history that suggests 'an account of [artwork's] change and ambiguity'.³¹² And, perhaps this is the most appropriate manner in which to approach the *objets de grève*, as both *documents of* and *to* multiple

the idea of *l'ascension sociale* [social mobility] in many of her works, including *La Place* (1983), translated into English as *A Man's Place*, and *La Honte* (1997), translated into English as *Shame*. In both books there are underlying themes that explore the difficulties in navigating the cultural worlds that differ between her, by her own admission, working-class upbringing in Normandy and subsequent life as an author. In *Retour à Reims* [Returning to Reims] (2009) the French author and philosopher Didier Eribon writes about his experiences of analysing his life in terms of class habitus after spending much of his career attributing his experiences and self-analysis to studies of transformations in his 'sexual habitus' using Bourdieu and Foucault's work. In *Retour à Reims*, Eribon probes his perceptions of social class and the shame he felt as a 'traitor' to his background in light of Bourdieu's sociological work and the psychoanalytic studies of Jacques Lacan (particularly pp. 18-21) after moving to Paris and becoming an openly-gay writer and academic. Édouard Louis writes about similar themes, too, in *En finir avec Eddy Belgeule* (translated into English as *The End of Eddy*) (2015). This concept is explored by Bourdieu in his later work with the idea of *habitus clivé* [cleft habitus], an inversion of his original concept of habitus that is used to describe the contradictions of habitus that a person encompasses when they 'leave' a particular class habitus and occupy spaces or take on mannerisms that are associated with another habitus. Bourdieu uses the term 'cleft habitus' to discuss the complexities of his own lived experience and communicating these 'coincidences of contraries' of attending a boarding school, Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris, in Paris, with his parents. See: Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, trans. by Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 93-104. However, it should be noted that Bourdieu's work has been criticised, amongst other reasons, for Bourdieu 'frequently mentioning his own social origins (increasingly as the years went by) in order to lend legitimacy to his work and to stress his own "authentic" roots as distinct from bourgeois academics who were themselves part of the dominant and dominating class'. See: Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 24.

³¹¹ T. J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1973), p. 11.

³¹² Clark, p. 13.

histories and peoples and their interhuman relations, and also to the complexities of accounting for the individual and collective endeavours of those involved in their many iterations.

Documents: 24, and 39 Objets de grève: A Question of Form

It is here, then, that the status of these objects as artworks and, indeed, whether the information about the conditions in which the objects were produced is necessary for their subsequent interpretation, can be questioned. One of the many issues at play in *Documents: 24, and 30 Objets de grève* is that of classification, which influences the display and reception of the objects and artwork. This involved the form which the artwork is presented, this time here referring to the Moulène's photographing of the objects. In a similar vein to the complexities of the title of the artwork pertaining the idea of *documents*, so too do the medium in which they are presented to audiences. It is not just that Moulène's photographs have been described as just that, photographs, but also as 'documentary' photography.³¹³ Taking cues from the theorist, photographer and critic, Allan Sekula, in his assessment of *Documents: 24 and 39 Objets de grève*, Magagnoli argues that the photographs possess a 'mystifying authority dovetailed with a superficial attention to the aesthetic qualities of documentary images that undermine authentic and potentially subversive contextual knowledge'.³¹⁴ The medium of photography, through its history of reproducing images as they appear in a specific moment, comes to be perceived as another format of *evidence*.³¹⁵ However, to assume such an approach can undermine the usage of the medium in the first place as dependent upon the contexts in which they were practices. As Magagnoli states, in instances of 'working-class uses of the medium [...] the hierarchical social relations that constitute capitalistic production are dissolved under the illusion of objectivity and completeness produced by the photographic archive'.³¹⁶ This complicates the nature of the Moulène's photographs since to adopt a position that considers these as *evidence* ignores the knowledge and power relations inherent to the image's production and consumption, or as Sekula describes this, 'the social workings of photography'.³¹⁷ For Sekula, 'photographic archives by their very structure maintain a hidden connection between knowledge and power'.³¹⁸ A similar approach to this field, albeit in the

³¹³ Berrebi, 'Jean-Luc Moulène's Dialectical Documents', p. 7.

³¹⁴ Magagnoli, p. 88. See, also: Allan Sekula, 'Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capitalism (1983)' in *The Photography Reader*, ed. by Liz Wells (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 443-452

³¹⁵ Focusing on the work of photographic archives, Sekula attributes this perception of photographs as 'factual' or 'historical' evidence to a combination of positivism, for which 'the camera provides mechanical and thus 'scientifically' objective evidence of 'data', and historicism, for which 'the archive confirms the existence of a linear progression from past to present'. See: Sekula, p. 447.

³¹⁶ Magagnoli, p. 88.

³¹⁷ Sekula, p. 449

³¹⁸ Sekula, p. 447.

broader art historical study rather than a specific mediation on photography, can be found in *Histoire de l'art et lutte des classes* [*Art History and Class Struggle*], written by Nicos Hadjinicolaou in 1973, in which the author writes of the presentation of power inherent in the production and reception of images, and the level of criticality necessary to offer a reading of such sources. Hadjinicolaou writes: 'since the characteristic of the image is to *show* something, since the image is something we see, those who hear of class struggle in the production of images expect to *read* the images as such'.³¹⁹ This relationship between power structures and the production and consumption of images is complicated further when the images themselves are considered to be representing a questioning of these structures, such as in the event of class struggle. In this sense, then, the description of *Documents: 24* or *39 Objets de grève* as 'documentary' blurs the lines between the production of the photographs and their potential representations.

On the note of exploring *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* as photographs, Berrebi's description of them 'as both iconic and documentary' becomes important.³²⁰ In the same way that the *objets de grève* have a duality of places, from the photographs and objets being separated, the same too can be said in their 'role' as photographs. As discussed, the nature of the images as 'documentary' is problematic, since the connotations of the term belie the multiplicity of meanings and structures inherent to the portrayal and presentation of *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève* in their photographic formats. However, it is Berrebi's assertion that the objects are 'iconic' that can be questioned given the nature of the objects being depicted and similar photographs concerned with workers' struggles that have taken up positions in the popular imagination. The term 'iconic' can refer to many things; from the idea of 'iconic' works of art that act as representations of the *crème de la crème* of art history, to religious iconography and theories surrounding the interpretation of artworks. However, if the term 'iconic' is applied to the presence of Moulène's photographs of *objets de grève* as markers of worker resistance in recent French history then it appears that they differ somewhat from those that have appeared before. Take, for example, Willy Ronis' photograph of Rose Zehner, an image that has been widely circulated in public discussions of *la grève*. The

³¹⁹ Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Histoire de l'art et lutte des classes* (Éditions La Découverte, 1973), p. 15. Emphasis taken from original source.

³²⁰ Berrebi, 'Jean-Luc Moulène's Dialectical Documents', p. 7. See, for example Besançon, the location of the LIP factory where strikers produced *Chômageopoly* discussed earlier in this chapter, is no stranger to being the subject of worker-focused documentaries. For example, in 1967, the CCPPO [Centre Culturel Populaire Palente Orchamps], invited the filmmaker Chris Marker to Besançon to spend time with workers striking from their jobs at the Rhodiaceta textie factory. Workers were striking in response to the company's plans to reduce production which would have impacted staff hours and benefits (the reduction in the factory's production meant that the company was using enforced days off against employees' holiday entitlement). After spending time in Besançon, Marker published workers' accounts of the strike in *Le nouvel observateur* and a year later, in 1968, he released the documentary *À bientôt, j'espère* [Until soon, I hope] which charted the events of the Rhodiaceta strike. See: Chris Marker, 'Les révoltes de Rhodia', *Le nouvel observateur*, 22 March 1967, p. 26.

photograph was taken in 1938 and shows Rose Zehner, an employee of the Citroën factory in Paris, addressing fellow members of the CGT, 'arms outstretched, finger pointed in the midst of giving a speech to colleagues at the Javal-Citroën factory'.³²¹ Here, the image shows an act in which Zehner and 'sa grande gueule' ['her big mouth'] rallying fellow workers in preparation for strike action.³²² The strike action in 1938 occurred in the aftermath of another series of historic strikes by the Popular Front that had taken place between May and June 1936.³²³ The photograph, when accompanied by the caption, presents perhaps a more *overt* representation of strike action, giving audiences the opportunity to assign identities to those on strike, unlike Moulène's *objets de grève*.³²⁴

Yet it is also the depiction of the *objets de grève*, rather than of those who created them, that is also crucial to their position as potential works of 'relational' art. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the *objets de grève* are the products of interhuman relations, with the depiction of these objects, arguably, coming to represent the peoples engaged in strike action. Here, it is useful to clarify a clear distinction that art historians and critics have made when viewing *Documents: 24*, and *39 Objets de grève*. When viewing the photographs of the *objets de grève*, taken and subsequently *presented* by Moulène to various audiences, there is tendency for these to be viewed as *objets d'art*. Perhaps this is a trope of art historical training. To return to an earlier point, the idea of art history as a discipline focusing on the art object has resulted in figures such as Magagnoli and Bois remarking that the information provided via captions and exhibition catalogues seems 'unnecessary', 'irrelevant' and 'parodic'. Such a view, thus, maintains an idea that the photographs need nothing else, no accoutrements, no *distractions* from the format in which they are being presented. To a certain extent this assessment seems fair and allows for a closer study of the 'glaring, almost reflective surfaces,' of the photographs themselves.³²⁵ This is a useful tool if wanting to offer a formalist critique, but it can be argued that to follow this particular view is to dismiss the inherent complexities and relations from which the *objets de grève* were produced. Moulène, through his personal collecting of strike objects from the 1980s onwards, simply happened to collate them and, as noted in the titles of the article and supplements in *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'art* and

³²¹ Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *Les luttes et les rêves: Une histoire Populaire de la France de 1685 à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2016), p. 89.

³²² Zancarini-Fournel, p. 89.

³²³ See, also: Antoine Prost, 'Les grèves de mai-juin 1936 revistées', *Le Mouvement Social* 200 (2002-3), 33-54.

³²⁴ The amateur photography of the economist Serge Grandvaux is widely acknowledged as representative of strike action. Between 1980-2014, Grandvaux photographed strike action, predominantly in France but also in Russia, Romania and Cuba, with much of his work being used in current affairs covering news of labour activism. See: Martine Le Roc'h Morgère, ed., *Camarades Photographiques sociétales de Serge Grandvaux* (Roubaix: Archives nationales du monde du travail, 2016).

³²⁵ Magagnoli, p. 108.

NVO, *presented* these to their respective readers.³²⁶ Examining the physical properties of the photographs directs attention towards the ambiguity of the images when viewed in isolation from their captions; are these adverts, and if so, how are the commodities presented to the audience? One of the implications of the 'glaring, almost reflective surfaces' of the photographs is that it has led critics to discuss the presentation of the *objets de grève* as commodities of sorts given their resemblance to advertisements.³²⁷ However, as the *objets de grève* themselves would not be sold within usual systems of exchange, the strike objects' likeness to advertisements furthers the ambiguity of the project by presenting objects in formats suggesting consumption, but this consumption being limited to contexts of strike action.

In an effort to interpret the ambiguity, it is worth considering the *objets de grève* in response to earlier work in French cultural and critical life. In the 1950s, the Situationist International introduced the idea of *détournement*, a practice defined by Guy Debord as:

Short for: *détournement* of pre-existing aesthetic elements. The integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no situationist painting or music, but only a situationists use of these means. In a more primitive sense, *détournement* within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which testifies to the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres.³²⁸

In practice, the process of *détournement* often involves the subtle altering of commonly shared or recognised signs, slogans and logos, as part of wider efforts to transform the experience of everyday life. More often than not, *détournement* operates on a small-scale, a scale in which individuals and 'small-time saboteurs gain consciousness of their alienation,' and in doing so 'are faced with the choice of accepting the spectacular totality, or completely rejecting it'.³²⁹ This can manifest itself in a number of ways; Debord cited Marcel Duchamp's moustached *Mona Lisa* as an example of *détournement*, a joke in which a widely recognised figure is altered, thus destabilising, even if only momentarily, the longstanding cultural assumptions and knowledge associated with the artwork. *Détournement*, therefore, is premised on a subverting of everyday life to encourage the questioning of societal forms and structures that shape day-to-day existence, meaning that commodities become a prime candidate for this process. Rooted in challenging the commodification of social life and the reification of social relations that mark and shape interhuman relations in capitalist societies, *détournement*

³²⁶ In *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'art* the article is titled: '24 Objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène' [24 Strike Objects Presented by Jean-Luc Moulène], and the NVO supplement is titled: 'Quarante objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène' [Forty Strike Objects presented by Jean-Luc Moulène].

³²⁷ See: Berribi, 'Jean-Luc Moulène's Dialectical Documents', p. 7; Pigeat, p. 41; Magagnoli, p. 109.

³²⁸ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 1994), unpaginated.

³²⁹ Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), p. 17.

encourages, or at least puts a name to a process of, debasing overarching societal structures through a DIY approach. In contemporary society, the commodity becomes the ideal object for *détournement*. As Situationist International scholar and cultural theorist Sadie Plant argues, 'although the dissemination of commodity relations throughout social experience might make consciousness of them more difficult, it also produces the starkest of choices and the unprecedented possibility of a radical break with the whole'.³³⁰ In this sense, then, there is a double case of *détournement* in *Documents: 24* or *39 Objets de grève*. To begin with, the strike objects themselves are *détourned*. When making the strike objects, particularly those which resemble the products that ordinarily would be sold, there was a deliberate decision on the part of workers to invert colourways and change texts to convey their message. This is the case, for example with the *Gauloises* cigarettes [Fig. 5]. The packets of cigarettes were created by striking workers at the *Gauloises* tobacco factory in Pantin. During the course of the strike, workers created packets of cigarettes that were circulated outside of usual spheres of exchange and were distinguished from those that were sold in *tabacs* by their red packaging; *Gauloises* cigarettes always appeared in blue packaging. Alongside this, one side of the cigarette packages read 'VENTE INTERDITE' [SALE FORBIDDEN], made by workers on strike', accompanied by the union label 'CGT', whilst on the reverse, the packet stated information about the factory and dates that the factories were being occupied, reading 'USINES DE TABAC DE PANTIN OCCUPÉES DEPUIS 23.2.82' [Tobacco factories of Pantin, occupied since 23.2.82].³³¹ The extent of the *détournement* of the *objets de grève* varied from strike to strike, but each object, whether via the inversion of a slogan, addition of information that the products were made by striking workers (as in the case of t-shirts, cigarettes and *Chômageopoly*), or invention of new formats (such as the *CHAIX* printworks catalogue). Or, as Verdier writes, the *objets de grève* are 'products of contestation, "disjunctive" products created under conditions of historical tension'.³³² At the next level, then, is the *détournement* of Moulène's photographs, the format of which have already been compared to advertisements. According to some critics, the process of *détournement* is second nature to Moulène, since he 'sets about countering the process that is turning everything – objects, art images, art, and even history – into a product'.³³³ The photographs, through their appearance as commodities that cannot be bought, garner jarring responses from the audiences. For the curator Sophie Duplaix, 'both the industry products and photographs are *détourned* objects'.³³⁴

³³⁰ Plant, p. 17.

³³¹ Roubaix, Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, 2003 025 009 – *Objets de grève – Objets divers, un paquet de cigarette "Gauloises" rouge*, 1982.

³³² Verdier, p. 43.

³³³ Verdier, p. 39.

³³⁴ Sophie Duplaix, 'Objets de grève / objets de reflexion, suivi de 24 Objets de grève présentés par Jean-Luc Moulène', *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'art Moderne* 71 (2000), 46-79, (p. 53).

When discussing *Documents*, Magagnoli argues that ‘the figure of the cheap, dumb and debased commodity tends to emerge as the empty signifier for the figure of the ‘underdog’ or the ‘oppressed people’.³³⁵ Delving into the realm of semiotics via the idea of the *objets de grève* acting as ‘empty signifiers’, Magagnoli probes one of the central concerns of the *Documents*. If the *objets de grève* are representative of workers on strike, or the ‘underdogs’ and ‘oppressed people’ that Magagnoli describes, then why is it that the workers are not depicted? Why, when collating the photographs, did Moulène not trace those involved in their creation, like Rouard did for the documentary *Les LIP, imagination au pouvoir*? As explored above, the depiction of the strike objects appearing like commodities can, in effect, remove their political capacity. Although the objects depicted are subverting the format of the commodities that ordinarily would be sold within ‘the system’, at first glance Moulène’s photographs offer little in the way of contrast between the strike objects and the commodified versions on which they are premised. However, considering these objects as ‘empty signifiers’ of the ‘underdogs’ or ‘oppressed people’ diminishes the decision to depict the objects, rather than images of the strike action from which they emerged. Diminishing, too, the efforts of those involved in the strike action by ascribing these figures positions that ordinarily might be pitied through the hindsight of history. There are multiple spaces and histories of the *objets de grève*, and this possibility of multiplicity also extends to the potential meanings and representations present in objects and their photographs. Here, it is useful to return to Barthes’ work, but this time focusing on the essays that appear alongside the infamous ‘*Le Mythe, aujourd’hui*’ [‘Myth Today’] which was published in *Mythologies*.³³⁶ First published as a collection in French in 1957, it was not until 1972 that Barthes’ texts were collated and translated into English. Many of the essays in both the French and English versions remain the same, ‘*Le vin et le lait*’ becomes ‘Wine and Milk’, ‘*Le Plastique*’ becomes ‘Plastic’, ‘*Le cerveau d’Einstein*’ is translated as ‘The Brain of Einstein’, and so on and so forth. Curiously, though, there are several essays that appear *en française* that did not make the cut in the English version, one of them being an essay titled ‘*L’usager de la grève*’ [‘Strike Users’].³³⁷ The essay is concerned with offering an analysis of those who engage with strike action or the ‘user(s)’ [*usager(s)*] of strike. In it, Barthes puts forth a reading of strike action, and the ways in which individuals engaged in strike action are portrayed within contemporary society. He begins by stating: ‘There are still

³³⁵ Magagnoli, p. 116.

³³⁶ *Mythologies* is comprised of a series of short essays Barthes wrote for his bi-monthly column in the magazine *Les Lettres Nouvelles*. The short essays are concerned with the day-to-day life and popular culture that was contemporary when Barthes was writing the texts in the 1950s.

³³⁷ The original French-language publication of *Mythologies* contains 53 of Barthes’ short essays alongside ‘*Le Mythe, aujourd’hui*’. The English version of *Mythologies* only contains 29 of Barthes’ short essays alongside ‘Myth Today’. Other examples of essays that were not translated include, ‘*Martiens*’ [‘Aliens’], ‘*Grammaire africaine*’ [‘African Grammar’], ‘*Le Tour de France comme épopée*’ [‘The Tour de France as an Epic’], and ‘*Puissance et désinvolture*’ [‘Power and Flippancy’], amongst others.

men for whom 'the strike' is a scandal: this is to say not only an error, a disorder or an offense, but a moral crime'.³³⁸ For Barthes, the perception of strike action and those engaged in it is a contradiction. It is something that is uncomfortable to those for whom strike action is often a response to (*'la société bourgeoise'*, as Barthes notes), due to their lack of awareness regarding the positions of power which they occupy in society. As Barthes goes on, 'the scandal comes from an illogicality: the strike is scandalous because it embarrasses precisely those it does not concern'.³³⁹ Rather than attempting to understand the reasons why workers might engage in strike action, usually concerning access to basic rights such as fair pay and equal opportunities which surely come under the umbrella of the 'morality' which, on a surface level, seems so central to the supposed values of *la société bourgeoise'*, Barthes argues that the default reaction of those in positions of power is to deflect and become defensive. In doing so, the rhetoric surrounding *l'usagers de la grève* centres around the strikers' opposition to mainstream society, in a complicated process of othering which pits 'the underdogs' as threats to everyday life – those engaged in strike action are positioned [*l'usagers* or *l'homme de la rue*] against taxpayers [*le contribuable*].³⁴⁰ The 'underdogs' and 'oppressed people' that Magagnoli describes in his account, according to Barthes' text, thus become figures in society seen as agitators and threats to the illusion of the 'natural order' which benefits the 'petit-bourgeoisie'.³⁴¹ To an extent this is true; to oppose 'the system' is an act that is inherently *against* the norms of contemporary French society; strike action is specifically designed to disorder [*désordre*]. Yet, at the same time, the principles at the centre of modern French life (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*) that are upheld and used as markers of 'morality' by those in positions of power, are precisely the product of uprisings. And, in the case of strike action, those actively using their *liberté* to oppose *inégalités*, via methods that rely on *fraternité* are positioned as solitary figures. Or, as Barthes states, by 'being embarrassed by strike action [...] the bourgeoisie reduce the strike to a solitary incident, to a phenomenon which one neglects to explain in order to better demonstrate the scandal [of strike action]'.³⁴² In short, rather than addressing the inequalities for which they, at the very least, play a role in perpetuating if not directly coercing, those in positions of power '*balayer elle sous le tapis*' [sweep the strike users under the carpet].³⁴³ If this is the case, then, and those engaged in strike action are depicted in ways that present their activities as contrary to benefitting wider social groups, then it is entirely possible for popular opinion to contest the actions of those on

³³⁸ Roland Barthes, '*L'usager de la grève*' in *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957), pp. 146-149, (p. 146).

³³⁹ Barthes, '*L'usager de la grève*', p. 146.

³⁴⁰ *L'usager* and *l'homme de la rue* [man of the street] are used interchangeably by Barthes throughout the essay.

³⁴¹ Barthes, '*L'usager de la grève*', p. 148.

³⁴² Barthes, '*L'usager de la grève*', p. 148.

³⁴³ Barthes, '*L'usager de la grève*', p. 148.

strike.³⁴⁴ For this reason, the usage of the *objets de grève* acting as representations of strike action can help to displace the ‘embarrassment’ or annoyance directed towards individual involved in strike activity, to the eventual indifference felt towards these movements as just ‘events’ in recent history. Rather than the union leaders, employees of companies on strike and supporters of the strike action becoming figureheads for public disapproval, the supposedly ‘empty signifiers’ of the objects come to act as *evidence* of the disputes, and depending upon the setting for their viewing, seen as objects that ‘are not made to clarify, but to complicate reality’.³⁴⁵

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, and elsewhere in this thesis, the idea of offering some form of watertight definition of ‘relational’ art, or ‘relational aesthetics’ was dismissed. The objective here is not to *redefine*, but to *reconsider Relational Aesthetics*. One of the distinctive features of the artworks that first appeared together in ‘Traffic’ under the pretence of being ‘relational’, was that the artworks displayed seemed to share very little in common. ‘Traffic’, and ‘relational’ art since then has taken on multiple forms, from scenarios, to paintings, to live events, to performances, to publications, sculptures, videos, therapy sessions, paintings and installations, and then some. For Bourriaud, the common thread running throughout these artworks was their ability to either represent potential interhuman relations, or to create spaces for possible encounters.³⁴⁶ What does it mean, then, for an artwork to be considered ‘relational’ when it has previously been discussed in terms of its photographic qualities or of its ability, *par des moyens détournés* [using indirect methods], to obscure and confuse the histories and exhibitions presented to various audiences? *Documents: 24*, and *39 Objets de grève*, or even the *Documents: 16, 30 and 40 Objets de grève*, or the *objets de grève* as strike objects, rather than *objets d’art* or the publication of *Documents: 24 and 39 Objets de grève présentées par Jean-Luc Moulène* are complicated. Within these various forms there are multiple histories and dislocations of peoples and places. The *objets de grève*, although emerging from industrial disputes at individual workplaces, are reliant on interhuman relations and an idea of community, in the broadest sense of the term, to *function* as objects that represent the efforts of those engaged in the inherently political act of withdrawing their labour in the name of strike

³⁴⁴ There are many instances of this, particularly in contemporary newspapers. As just one example, during the strikes of 1995, the right-leaning newspaper *Le Figaro* consistently published articles criticising public sector workers engaged in strike action in an effort to destabilise the activities of trade unions and alter public perception of workers. For example, railway workers recalled the ‘vitriolic’ articles, in which the hatred of trade unions was explicit, not only in attempting to shift public opinion to oppose those on strike, but also ‘to encourage employees to oppose their trade unions. See: Gilbert Garrel, ‘Le mouvement de 1995’, *Les Cahiers de L’institut CGT d’histoire sociale*, 55:4 (2015), 10-29, (p. 26).

³⁴⁵ Pigaet, p. 41.

³⁴⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 18; p. 113.

action. In and of themselves the strike objects, long before being photographed by Moulène, embody interhuman relations. As objects they, just like the ‘relational aesthetics’ described by Bourriaud, ‘represent, produce and prompt’ interhuman relations. The *objets de grève*, therefore, whether in circulation to raise funds to support industrial action, waiting in sealed boxes of archives to be pondered over by interested parties, or in printed formats circulated to thousands of trade union members, can be considered as ‘social’ objects. Not only does the ‘social’ here refer to the various social histories which the objects and photographs encapsulate, but also to the potential spaces and encounters that the *objets de grève* have and continue to facilitate. Even if Moulène’s phase of collecting and photographing strike objects is over, it is not he that is the singular author of these objects. Instead, in preferring to ‘present’ *Documents: 24 or 39 Objets de grève* to wider audiences through a medium that can be easily reproduced, the relationality of the strike objects is maintained and perpetuated. The formats put forth by Moulène opened up these objects to a different audience, an audience that may not have possibly encountered the pertinence of strike objects. Had the exhibition of the *objets de grève* stayed at a local mining museum, or had Moulène’s photographs of these objects only been circulated to trade union members, their relationship to strike action and social movements would probably have remained in this ‘field’ of sorts. The photographs might end up acting, as Foucault notes, as *documents* or *monuments* to these specific events in worker and cultural histories. To this end, too, the place of the *objets de grève* in this thesis was *earned* through coming across types of *documents* that positioned Moulène’s photography as something of note to contemporary French art and culture. The multiplicities of forms and potential spaces for encounter facilitated by the various iterations of *Documents: 24 and 39 Objets de grève*, also afford discussion to the complications inherent to a project such as this one, which straddles disciplinary fields. This chapter, then, has *reconsidered* the photographs and the *objets* themselves by subscribing to, but with an awareness of, the tropes of using *documents* as *evidence* per se. Perhaps here, it is necessary to consider whether *Documents: 24 and 39 Objets de grève* were ahead of their time, or rather, *of* their time, but this too points towards the complexities of writing histories and ascribing identities and purposes to those objects which will endure, of objects that simultaneously encompass the temporalities and relations of innumerable places, peoples and environments. Like much of the ‘relational’ art described by Bourriaud, the *objets de grève*, in their various guises, are complex; a potential meaning of these objects and artworks are difficult to pin down. The idea of the social histories of the objects being in opposition to the art historical readings of the photographs are indicative of the limitations of disciplinary fields, rather than of the potentialities of the *objets de grève*, in all of their forms, to represent and encourage interhuman relations. In this respect, then, it seems fair to suggest that *Documents: 24 and 39 Objets de grève* are ‘relational’. Despite not being included in *Relational Aesthetics*, the

capacity of the *objets de grève*, in both practical and theoretical senses, to 'represent, produce or prompt' *les relations interhumaines* does not seem so farfetched after all.

Part III 'Relational' Exchange(s)

Imagine the scenario; you are invited to attend an exhibition concerned with exploring interhuman relations, some loose references to something called *Relational Aesthetics* are made, but you think nothing further of it. You travel to the exhibition, enter the gallery space and are greeted by a 'relational' artwork. The nature of this work is vague, but there are others in the room also attempting to engage in dialogue with one another, making awkward small talk, or at worst, looking for the exit to avoid interactions completely. These are just a few possibilities that may happen when in these particular environments but, of course, there are many other ways to interact and form interhuman relations both inside and outside of the spaces in which 'relational' art takes place. Sometimes these experiences leave viewers uncomfortable, other times engaged, maybe even *convivial*. When the prospect of sharing or consuming something is brought into the mix, another can of worms is opened. When recalling their interaction with Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled* (pad Thai) (1990), where the viewer is given a free plate of food, one critic wrote of the social anxiety felt around participating, thinking, 'Maybe I shouldn't do this--they'll think I'm a moocher'.³⁴⁷ Even in the supposedly 'free areas of exchange' facilitated by 'relational art', the burden of judgment from others and self-consciousness persists. As the critic concluded of their experience, 'I felt sheepish, guilty, like I was a freeloader'.³⁴⁸ This worry, then, of being considered a 'freeloader', a person who 'mooches' and takes advantage of the generosity of others might be thought of as a sign of embarrassment for some, yet, for others this is a source of pride; an emblem that suggests an ability to live precariously, relying on wit and charm to survive. Take, for instance, then, the work of Matthieu Laurette, a French artist who made headlines for being the 'Freebie King' [Fig. 9].³⁴⁹ Much of Laurette's practice focuses on the nature of exchange, and in particular on capitalising on exchanges at the expense of others. Of course, in order for there to be an exchange, a transaction, there needs to be at least two parties, thereby establishing relations between each other, even if just for the duration of the transaction. However, like Moulène's *Documents: 24 and 39 Objets de grève*, Laurette's work which is premised on exchange, in a literal sense, with the establishing of interhuman relations being a pre-requisite for his practice, is not considered 'relational'. Laurette was working analogously to those associated with *Relational Aesthetics*, yet his work is absent from its pages. Laurette's art forms the basis for this chapter, focusing particularly on the ways in which 'exchange' has been facilitated in recent French art via his practice. Given his credentials as 'The Freebie King', this chapter will

³⁴⁷ Beshty [accessed 18 November 2018].

³⁴⁸ Beshty [accessed 18 November 2018].

³⁴⁹ Matthieu Laurette, *Selected Works (1993-2003)* (self-published by author, 2003), p. 21.

spend much of its focus on *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* (1993-2003), a multimedia artwork which took place over a decade. The project saw the artist live by taking advantage of manufacturers' promises to refund customers if they were unhappy with their products. Considering Laurette's work in light of critiques of the concept of exchange in *Relational Aesthetics*, this chapter seeks to broaden the parameters of what is considered 'relational' art, as well as examining how exchange is a shared concern of many artists working in France during the 1990s. Doing so will demonstrate the complicated nature of exchange not just as a phenomenon confined to Bourriaud's odd theoretical formation of 'relational' art, but also in questioning the form and perception of artworks that challenge existing structures.

Critical Exchange(s)

Having discussed critiques to which *Relational Aesthetics* was subjected earlier in this project, there was a distinct absence of one of the most critical texts that has been written on 'relational' art to date. In 2007, philosopher Stewart Martin published 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics'. The essay challenges *Relational Aesthetics* through a reading of exchange. Martin challenges Bourriaud's assertion that 'relational' art can somehow facilitate interhuman relations outside of the sphere of capitalism. When explaining this phenomenon, Bourriaud suggests that the notion of the *interstice* can be used. Borrowing this term from Marx, Bourriaud describes the interstice as being used to 'describe trading communities that elude the capitalist economic context by being removed from the law of profit: barter, merchandising, autarkic types of production, etc.'³⁵⁰ As he continues, 'the interstice is a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within this system'.³⁵¹ Here, as in all other facets of *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud relies on the notion of conviviality; the assumption that within the interstice everything 'more or less harmoniously' fits together. Such a notion has connotations of cosiness, drawing correlations between the interstice as the space in which the 'arty parties' that Foster describes take place.³⁵² So far, so good. Bourriaud's explanation of the interstice implies a possibility of a space exempt from capitalism that allows for a rehabilitation to remedy the ways in which 'the general mechanisation of social functions gradually reduces the relational space'.³⁵³ However, Bourriaud claims that it is art that has the capacity to facilitate an interstice of sorts. No longer happy with simply discussing 'relational' art and 'relational aesthetics' as a break from history and completely unlike anything that has ever existed,

³⁵⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 16.

³⁵¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 16.

³⁵² Foster, p. 22.

³⁵³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 17.

Bourriaud turns his attention to the not-so-small matter of attempting to overcome the reification of social relations. As he argues:

[the interstice] is the precise nature of the contemporary art exhibition in the arena of representational commerce: it creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the “communication zones” that are imposed upon us.³⁵⁴

As has already been established, there are many facets of *Relational Aesthetics* that are problematic. In some instances, the theoretical inaccuracies can be overlooked in favour of *interacting* with artworks that would otherwise have remained unknown. Yet, it is Bourriaud's total ignorance towards the nature of exchange and value that call for a critique such as Martin's. Whilst *Relational Aesthetics* can be perceived as a wholesome affair through its focus on creating moments of 'conviviality', by suggesting that 'relational' art and the social relations on which it relies to function, and hopes to elicit, can take place 'freely', this very claim ignores the inherent inequalities at play in day-to-day interactions. Rather than offering critical insight into the nature of human relations, in this formation *Relational Aesthetics* ends up serving, rather than challenging predominant ideologies. Or as Stephen Wright argues:

['relational aesthetics'] end up reproducing within the symbolic economy of art the sort of class-based relations of expropriation that Marx saw at work in the general economy: on the one hand, those who hold the symbolic capital (the artists), and on the other, those whose labour (such as it is) are used to foster the accumulation of more capital.³⁵⁵

As Gardner notes, when considering artistic models such as *Relational Aesthetics*, that are based on 'sociability' are symptomatic of 'contemporary art's points of reference and engagement increasingly dissolv[ing] the discourse specificity of art history in favour of art's expanded relation to contemporary socio-politics'.³⁵⁶ According to Gardner, this attempt at self-distancing from criticism, or 'treating [contemporary art] as immune from deconstruction,' risks such practices being 'reduced to hollowed, hallowed signifiers'.³⁵⁷ By ignoring these theoretical questions, 'relational aesthetics' is reduced to a parody of sorts, one which has invited criticism for its blatant disregard of context. Similarly, if 'relational' artworks end up as 'hallowed signifiers', then was there really any point in paying them attention? If none, then surely the reputation of *Relational Aesthetics* as 'cannibalistic argot' seems fair; like a snake eating its own tale, *Relational Aesthetics* perpetuates the criticism of which it is a target.

At the heart of Martin's critique are three central concerns, that 'relational aesthetics and relational art should be seen as a development in the dialectical relation of

³⁵⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 16.

³⁵⁵ Stephen Wright, 'The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration', *Third Text* 18:6 (2004), 533-545, (p. 535).

³⁵⁶ Gardner, p. 182.

³⁵⁷ Gardner, p. 182.

commodification'; the second revolves around the notion that '*Relational Aesthetics* effectively manifests an extreme heteronomous critique of art's autonomy,' and; 'that it is in these terms that so-called relational art functions as an immanent critique of commodity form, or rather a political struggle over subjection to the commodity form'.³⁵⁸ For Martin, *Relational Aesthetics* cannot claim to exist in 'free areas' if it does not engage with the debates that shape the conditions in which this might be possible. As Martin continues, 'in aspiration at least, *Relational Aesthetics* sees art as having an essentially critical relation to capitalist culture, defined by its resistance to exchange-value and, at least implicitly, its struggle with subjection to the value-form'.³⁵⁹ The nature of 'value' in *Relational Aesthetics* is glossed over by Bourriaud. In emphasising the immateriality of relations, and insisting that 'relational' art and artists 'embark upon a dialogue,' there are no efforts made to address the complexities of these questions.³⁶⁰ Bourriaud, through his omissions of theoretical engagement, becomes a victim of his own critique. Through making grand claims to economic exceptionalism through 'relational' art and its reliance on facilitating interhuman relations, Bourriaud ignores the ways in which exchange value manifest. As Martin notes, 'Capitalist exchange value is not constituted at the level of objects, but of social labour, as a measure of abstract labour. It is the commodification of labour that constitutes the value of 'objective' commodities'.³⁶¹ This becomes important not only in discussions of the participant (i.e., the extents to which audiences labour for 'relational' art) but also of the work of the artists themselves. For Bourriaud the artist as curator-designer-docent-and anything else they fancy is considered as a response to the times. However, suggesting a flexibility of artists through adapting evolving according to market demands, shows precisely how 'relational aesthetics' is unable to resist market forces. In suggesting that the expanding of skill sets is anything other than necessity is to fetishise the neoliberal management speak that congratulates workers for 'going above and beyond'. A revision, or *reconsideration* of *Relational Aesthetics* in these terms is necessary. The limitations of Bourriaud's efforts to explicate exchange do not go beyond the initial cries for its inherent use-value to 'relational' art. Without exchange, the relations simply cannot happen; the 'value' of relational art then is a product of the labour expended by its relations, relations who will also be subjected to a harsh fall back to reality after emerging from the supposedly cosy 'free areas' of exchange of the interstice. Perhaps, then, the interstice is not an apt tool to describe the potentials for exchange within 'relational' exchange(s). Instead, *lacunae*, a term used by Althusser to discuss the unfilled gaps, or voids that are resistant to ideological powers.³⁶² Or, perhaps, engaging in theoretical discussions *Relational Aesthetics*

³⁵⁸ Martin, p. 371.

³⁵⁹ Martin, p. 376.

³⁶⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 22.

³⁶¹ Martin, p. 378.

³⁶² See: Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2008)

is similar to the experience of being in a void; making claims that nobody hears or wishes to exchange. As a reminder, for Bourriaud, 'relational' art is 'a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space'.³⁶³ However, there is little, if any, regard for how 'social context' impacts social relations and the creation of supposedly 'free areas,' in which the laws of capitalism do not apply. In spite of 'relational aesthetics' being based upon 'judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt,' Bourriaud seems to have missed the memo about judging capitalism on the basis on the human relations which it represents, produces or prompts.³⁶⁴

Exchange(s) as Form

So how does exchange function as form, or perhaps how does form function as exchange in 'relational' art? And, what does it mean to consider these questions in the context of an artwork that takes exchange as its foundation; of an artwork that is rooted in the act of exchange and relies on *les relations interhumaines* to function since these are the key characteristics of 'relational' art? If, according to Bourriaud, 'art is made of the same material as the social exchanges,' then how might these appear, what might they *look* like?³⁶⁵ A simple answer to this question is that they simply do not appear, nor do they look like anything. As Karolin Gritzner suggests, 'A form is not an object or a homogenous product created by an artist; it is an unstable notion, irreducible to materiality'.³⁶⁶ Bourriaud's description of the shared (im)materiality of exchange and form, however, is predisposed to the assumed 'free' exchange taking place in the context of 'relational aesthetics'. Yet, as Martin discusses this assertion of exteriority, or of exchange as interstitial is insufficient in *Relational Aesthetics* since to overcome the 'alienation of social relations in art remains bound to a political project of anti-capitalism,' with 'such a project requir[ing] a critique of the dialectics of social exchange in capitalist culture'.³⁶⁷ In this vein, Bourriaud's conceptions of both form and exchange are placed in the realm of exceptionalism, as abstract ideas 'set apart from other things produced by human activities'.³⁶⁸ This suggestion contradicts the 'impulse of relational art [...] is to contest the autonomous space of art and to emphasise that artist construction is essentially a social practice which engages the collective as much as the individual in the immediate context

³⁶³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 113.

³⁶⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 112.

³⁶⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 40.

³⁶⁶ Karoline Gritzner, 'Form and Formlessness – Participation at the Limit', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 16:4 (2011), 109-116, (p. 111).

³⁶⁷ Martin, p. 386.

³⁶⁸ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 41.

of life'.³⁶⁹ Through assuming its 'exceptional' qualities situates 'relational' art and 'relational aesthetics' outside of the 'everyday' in which it supposedly can function to provide pauses from the capitalist exchange that rely on constant cycles of production and consumption. If for Bourriaud there is an interdependency of form and exchange, with neither appearing without the presence of the other, then surely this translates in everyday life. However, the specificity of Bourriaud's argument which demands that 'relational' art provide the necessary *space* for these exchanges is at odds with his own ideas. As Martin proposes, in *Relational Aesthetics* 'art is conceived as an immediate form of non-capitalist life'.³⁷⁰ To assume that 'relational' art is 'non-capitalist' is to place upon it political conditions that are never justified. This is something, too, which as discussed in 'Part I: Contextualising *Relational Aesthetics*', is problematic as it fails to take into account the ideological structures that shape form(s) and exchange(s). Similarly, Bourriaud articulates the process of creating form, stating that 'producing a form is to invent possible encounters; receiving a form is to create the conditions for an exchange, the way you return a service in a game of tennis'.³⁷¹ But what about for those that are not into tennis? In this iteration of exchange there is also an assumed reciprocity of exchange and relation. Although Bourriaud's work is premised on the conviviality of interhuman relations, the assumption of the reciprocity of relations is at odds with the (im)materiality of form that 'relational' art often takes. As Gritzner notes, 'art is conceived as an inter-subjective, inter-human social practice, a dialogue and an encounter'.³⁷² Even though in *Relational Aesthetics*, exchange is equated with 'form', with the latter term being used to outline 'artistic practice [that] involves creating a form capable of "lasting", bringing heterogenous units together on a coherent level, in order to create a relationship to the world,' the extent to which such 'encounters' can last can be called into question.³⁷³ Whilst Bourriaud's assertion that 'art is made of the same material as social exchanges' assumes an homogeneity of form and exchange, so too, does this reduce the potential for 'relational' exchange. This collapsing of experience also seems at odds with what he later describes as the potential for 'relational' art to be 'capable of deterring our perception before "hooking it up again" to other possibilities: that of an *'operator of junctions in subjectivity'*'.³⁷⁴ In homogenising the exchange-form dialectic there is also a removal of possibility for subjectivity, focusing instead on the 'relational' as a collective entity with a shared purpose. Perhaps this account of exchange(s) as form serves to further demonstrate the problematic nature of 'relational' art and its claims

³⁶⁹ Gritzner, p. 109.

³⁷⁰ Martin, p. 379.

³⁷¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 23.

³⁷² Gritzner, p. 109.

³⁷³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 23; p. 111.

³⁷⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 99.

for economic exceptionalism via vague, and oftentimes confusing theoretical misgivings. Once again, *Relational Aesthetics* seems to say everything, but nothing at all.

Marché du 'Traffic'

There is also something to be said about the presence of exchange in *Relational Aesthetics* as a metaphor for contemporary society, with 'relational' or 'social' exchanges acting as euphemisms for the market forces which shape everyday life. Many of the artworks included in 'Traffic' were exhibited in the nave of the gallery [Fig. 10]. In part, this was for practical reasons since many of the objects were large, necessitating their existence in the biggest area of CAPC. However, the large-scale projects taking place in the centre of CAPC was also a deliberate effort to recreate the form of a market. Or, as stated in the press release for the exhibition, the exhibits in the central nave were curated to resemble 'a place of exchange and concrete shops, following the model of urban spaces or markets'.³⁷⁵ In this sense, all of the artworks included in 'Traffic' are entering a both a conceptual and *literal* market. Although Bourriaud argues that this space is 'free' this remains an unsubstantiated claim. As Martin has argued, there is an absence of criticism 'of the political economy of social exchange that disengages from capitalist exchange'.³⁷⁶ Rather than appearing, as Bourriaud intended, as 'free' relations to be experienced, the artworks all compete like commodities albeit in an economy driven by social relations and potential engagements rather than the accumulation of capital. If looking at the layout of 'Traffic', it can be noted that each artwork is displayed in its own space. Exhibits are displayed together but without getting too close, respecting the space of each work as its own [Fig. 3]. This arrangement gives the viewer/consumer chance to look around the artwork, see it from all angles before making a considered decision to engage or avert their eyes and take their relations elsewhere. It can be argued, though, that such an arrangement is indicative of contemporary society and the marketisation of urbanity to which it is both a product of, and subject to. In his study of the production of space, Lefebvre notes that 'everyone knows what is meant when we speak of a 'room' in an apartment, the 'corner' of the street, a 'marketplace', a shopping or culture 'centre, a public 'place' and so on'.³⁷⁷ As he continues, 'these terms of everyday discourse serve to distinguish but not to isolate, particular spaces, and [...] correspond to a specific use of that space, and hence to a spatial practice that they express and constitute'.³⁷⁸ Social relations are organised according to spatial practices. If 'Traffic' is organised like a market with the function of engineering the

³⁷⁵ Archives de CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 'Traffic' – communiqué de presse.

³⁷⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 16; Martin, p. 371.

³⁷⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford; Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1991), p. 16.

³⁷⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 16.

'interhuman commerce' of which Bourriaud writes, then these will be dependent on perceiving the space (CAPC) as one that operates in the arena of 'representational commerce'.³⁷⁹ However, Bourriaud's 'representational commerce' is not defined, so what exactly are 'relational' artworks 'representing'? Did 'Traffic' 'represent' the potential for of 'free interhuman commerce', or did participants partake in exchange(s) of 'interhuman commerce'? On this topic of 'Traffic' as marketplace, a further level of ambiguity is added when considering the notion of 'traffic' since, according to Lefebvre it is representative of urbanisation. With the development of 'new towns' and changes to daily life, Lefebvre argues that 'crossing points and traffic have assumed greater importance than inhabited spaces'.³⁸⁰ These spaces are spaces of transition, of 'continuities and discontinuities that are interwoven in a confusion that is expressed in spatial order'.³⁸¹ In this sense then, the marketplace is presented as space of traffic, of a space that is primed for comings and goings and the brief exchanges that will take place as a result. Though the spatial organisation of 'Traffic' was designed to conceptually and physical represent a marketplace, the overall function of exchange in these spaces is difficult to discern. Unlike arenas for conviviality, the context of the marketplace is embedded within context; for some it suggests the leisurely perusal of goods, for others the busy and overwhelming experience of fulfilling the needs of day-to-day life. It seems safe to say that if this were the case, that *Relational Aesthetics* would subscribe to the former notion of the market as space. In the event that *les relations interhumaines* really are free, then who is to say that they will look any different? In Bourriaud's writing, there is nothing to indicate that the nature of, or interactions themselves would radically alter in the context of interstitial spaces, other than ideologically. Perhaps to suggest these things is to give Bourriaud the benefit of the doubt, to try and reconcile weak theoretical explorations with metaphors about urban life. However, the shaping of exchanges that take place when considering the curatorial rationale of exhibitions of 'relational' art and the multiplicity of spaces involved undoubtedly impacts the nature of the social relations that these environments may prompt.

(Un)Even Exchange - *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products*

If the exchange that is supposedly central to 'relational' art is so difficult to discern, what does it mean for artworks to be involved in *explicit* exchange? This is a challenging question; in the same way that *les relations interhumaines* are difficult to visualise and measure, so too is exchange. When Bourriaud speaks of the (im)materiality of 'relational' art this generally refers to conceptual nature of relations. So, what does it mean for an artist to use exchange as a

³⁷⁹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 17.

³⁸⁰ Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 766.

³⁸¹ Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*, p. 766.

medium? This is the case in hand when referring to the work of Matthieu Laurette, a French artist who worked analogously to his 'relational' counterparts but deflected any calls to be tarred with the same brush of *Relational Aesthetics*. He is a 'self-proclaimed conceptual artist' whose work is often associated with the rise of 'new media' art in the 1990s.³⁸² Writing in 2002, in *Postproduction*, Bourriaud described Laurette's practice, stating that 'he plays with economic forms as if they were the lines and colours of a painting'.³⁸³ Interestingly, this is a line of thought that does not require any further questioning of Bourriaud's approach; such is to say, then, that economic forms are the basis of much of his practice. Since the 1990s, Laurette has experimented with exchange and the spectacle. In discussions of recent French art, Laurette's art offers examples that demonstrate the potentialities of exchange for initiating ongoing projects that grapple with experiences of contemporary consumer capitalism. One example of this is Laurette's, *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* (1993-2003) [Fig. 9] a project which involved 'the consummation and subsequent reimbursement of foods that feature statements like 'satisfied or your money back'.³⁸⁴ The premise, then, is simple. On the occasion of seeing Laurette's project at the 2001 Venice Biennale, the art critic Harald Szeemann suggested that '[Laurette] imagines a system to eat without spending money, thanks to sales promotions on the first purchase refunded'.³⁸⁵

Between 1993-2003, *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* grew exponentially. What had started out as an experiment to 'live for free', evolved into something which took on multiple forms, from catalogue and leaflets, to sculptures and installations – there was even a touring bus from which Laurette gave talks and lectures to shoppers in supermarket car parks across France. As with much of his work, Laurette's practice has been compared to that of the Situationist International as a result of the ways in which the projects are formulated and distributed. For example, over the course of a week in October in 1997, Laurette took his *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* on the road to Nantes [Fig. 11]. Housed in a converted bus, the vehicle acted as a mobile showroom, with Laurette displaying a shopping trolley containing items for which he had been reimbursed, alongside photographs of news articles featuring his money saving tips. In addition to this, a leaflet was printed advertising free entry to Laurette's mobile installation, as well as details of the project's appearances in popular media [Fig. 12]. The leaflets also featured sample menus comprised of products that

³⁸² Dorothee Dupuis, 'Tropicalize Me! Part 2', *Terremoto*, 20 May 2014 <https://terremoto.mx/online/tropicalize-me-part-2/> [access 23 April 2019].

³⁸³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), p. 32.

³⁸⁴ Jörg Heiser, 'What's for Whom and How?' in *Notre histoire...: une scène artistique française émergente*, ed. by Nicolas Bourriaud, Jérôme Sans and Frédéric Gross (Paris: Palais de Tokyo, Paris Musées, 2006), pp. 134-141, (p. 135).

³⁸⁵ Harald Szeemann, 'L'idée d'art total s'est révélée une utopie', *Le Monde*, 9 June 2001 <https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2001/06/09/harald-szeemann-l-idee-d-art-total-s-est-revelee-une-utopie_194478_1819218.html> [accessed 16 April 2019].

offered a money back guarantee as inspiration for any interested parties. The same year, Laurette installed *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* in Parc La Villette, Paris. Although Laurette did not host any workshops in this iteration, self-help guides were made available to visitors. Over the years that followed, the project could be found in various galleries and museum across Europe, usually with newspaper articles adorning the walls whilst the *produits remboursés* were display in glass cabinets, presenting them as *objets d'art* within their given context. In the year 2000, demand for the project grew after Laurette's made tabloid newspaper headlines in the United Kingdom, with an article in the *Daily Record* nicknaming him 'The Freebie King'.³⁸⁶ In 2001, then, when *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* was selected for the Venice Biennale, 'The Freebie King' marked the occasion by commissioning a life-sized replica statue of himself pushing a trolley filled to the brim with reimbursed goods that would be included in subsequent displays of the work [Fig. 9].

Throughout his career, there have been comparisons made between Laurette's work and that of the Situationist International. Laurette's work is often seen as subversive, with one critic going as far to suggest that the artist is the 'offspring of Andy Warhol and Guy Debord'.³⁸⁷ The elision of life activities with art, or of depictions of the everyday, is a central question of Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. In the case of *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products*, art historian Martin Patrick has pondered over whether 'Laurette's delving into this project becomes a life-activity or an art-piece'.³⁸⁸ According to Debord, 'as culture becomes completely commodified it tends to become the star commodity of spectacular society'.³⁸⁹ In Laurette's work, though there is a subversion of the commodity; is it the products for which Laurette is reimbursed that are displayed, or is it Laurette whose notoriety as 'The Freebie King' affords him the opportunities to capitalise on his brand? In this sense, then, it seems as if Laurette's work, like Bourriaud's discussions of 'relational aesthetics' becomes a victim of its own successes, or maybe a victim of the fawning of critics. On the surface, Laurette's project offers an interesting take on the nature of exchange. It appears to be operating in a way that suggests through taking companies up on offers that they propose, somehow 'the little man' is gaining a small victory over the anonymous corporations. In a review of the artwork, critic Jörg Heiser described Laurette as 'systematically feeding, literally, on the companies' gimmicky trick to promote their brand'.³⁹⁰ But, it seems as if Heiser has missed one of the many points that the artwork offers; the fact that Laurette's reclaiming of

³⁸⁶ N/A, 'The Freebie King', *Daily Record*, 8 December 2000, p. 37.

³⁸⁷ Stuart Jeffries, 'Young, gifted and French', in *The Guardian*, 16 November 2000 <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2000/nov/16/artsfeatures1>> [accessed 22 November 2018].

³⁸⁸ Martin Patrick, 'Apparitions: Art/Life Games and the Politics of Play in the Work of Matthieu Laurette', *Drainmag*, 2006 <<http://www.drainmag.com/ContentPLAY/Essay/Patrick.html>> [accessed 3 April 2017].

³⁸⁹ Debord, unpaginated.

³⁹⁰ Heiser, p. 135.

spent funds becomes a gimmick, too; 'The Freebie King'. Within this work there is a strange level of self-reflexivity, one in which 'The Freebie King' is heralded a contemporary icon, all through spending money on commodities to then reclaim them. In a capitalist society that places value on belongings, 'The Freebie King' plays the role of champion of the people; he might be cash poor but can sort you out with supplies of bleach or frozen party food. According to Bourriaud, when 'Laurette is reimbursed for products he has consumed by systematically using promotional coupons ("Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back"), he operates within the cracks of the promotional system'.³⁹¹ However, it could be argued that Laurette is not working 'within the cracks'. His actions are not seedy, not underhand, just less usual that society might usually entertain. Bourriaud states that in contemporary art, relations and exchange(s) should be seen 'as mediums of experience,' not objects since to do so 'would be to fall into the trap of reification'. Yet, in seeing *value* in the *Produits remboursés/Money-back Products*, Bourriaud doubles back on himself, even though not in the context of debates surrounding *Relational Aesthetics*, referring back to what Martin describes as a fetishisation of the supposedly 'non-fetishised space of art'.³⁹²

Conclusion

In Martin's critique of *Relational Aesthetics*, they argued that it had 'acquired the status of an 'ism', a name for what is new about contemporary art'.³⁹³ The issues here are twofold, firstly in thinking through what 'relational aesthetics' as an 'ism' even comprises. For Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* and its interests in the 'interhuman space can today be considered, both in theory and in practice, to be the horizon of the new generation of artists, but, as discussed elsewhere in this project, 'relationality' can mean different things in different contexts; do Laurette's travelling showrooms provide spaces for exchange through the information and products traded? Or, do they fall under the rubric of 'community' or 'socially engaged art' through the sharing of information that is *useful*, that can aid in others finding joy (and saving money) through starting their own projects of *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products*. *Relational Aesthetics* as an 'ism' also confuses the rhetoric of 'relational' art, too – does the ism refer to Bourriaud's text, thus rendering a little black book of 'relational' artists, or is it, thus speaking to a historicisation of 'relational' art as a fleeting moment in a history of art amongst many others?³⁹⁴ Or, does the ism allow 'relational' art to persist, to endure and work towards the 'potential horizons' outlined in "Traffic", rendering 'relational aesthetics' as ahistorical but also conforming to the conventions of linearity relied on in certain areas of art history for

³⁹¹ Bourriaud, *Postproduction*, p. 16.

³⁹² Martin, p. 376.

³⁹³ Martin, p. 369.

³⁹⁴ Archives de CAPC, 'Traffic' – communiqué de presse.

studies of art? And then, does this ism refer to the *relationism* of aesthetics, or to the aestheticism of relations? Once again, 'relational' art and 'relational aesthetics' defies the boundaries of artistic and disciplinary fields. Here, it is useful to return back to the example cited at the beginning of this chapter of the critic's anxiety about interacting with 'relational' art. In participating, just by being in the same space in which 'relational aesthetics' was at work the critic felt awkward and self-conscious about being perceived as a 'freeloader'.³⁹⁵ This scenario, which resulted in the critic feeling ill at ease was a product of both the potential exchange(s) and relations at play within the artwork and institution in which it was housed. The assumed activity required of the participant, to *actually* engage with 'relational' art through consuming its products, and through relating to others or to different facets of the artwork combines the duality, and necessity of exchange and interhuman relations to 'relational' art. In discussing the complex and often contradictory, yet irrevocably interlinked, notions of exchange(s) and relations the complexity of 'relational aesthetics' is brought to the fore, in the event that it ever disappeared from debates surrounding 'relational' art. As Beshty notes in *Relational Aesthetics*, 'societal contradictions and a specifically capitalist anxiety' is 'typified in the free market mantra: 'there ain't no such thing as a free lunch'.³⁹⁶ Laurette's *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* toe a fine line between societal contradictions and capitalist-induced anxiety. This project is jarring for its audiences; it is tongue in cheek, harking back to principles of *détournement* outlined by the Situationist International through its subject matter and dissemination via public events and appearances in national newspapers and television shows, but also speaks to a contemporary audience, to the communities of people who share money-saving tips online - maybe Matthieu Laurette is the French Martin Lewis.³⁹⁷ At the same time, Laurette's work is inherently 'relational', the premise of the project is a process of exchange, and the sharing of these exchanges through the various spaces for encounter, whether in galleries, newspapers or supermarket car parks. It seems, then, that Laurette's work simultaneously embraces and challenges the 'theoretical and historical precariousness' that Martin argues is central to *Relational Aesthetics*.³⁹⁸ But perhaps there is a difference here between the artworks discussed by Bourriaud and Laurette's *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products*. It could be said that there is a degree of self-awareness in Laurette's work, a sense at least of the parodic nature of his project in which small victories

³⁹⁵ Beshty [accessed 18 November 2018].

³⁹⁶ Beshty [accessed 18 November 2018].

³⁹⁷ Here, this refers to the UK popular daytime television presenter Martin Lewis who, since the early 2000s, has offered consumers advice on saving money through his moniker as a 'Money Saving Expert'. See: Simon Hattenstone, 'Interview: Martin Lewis: 'Having money is not happiness, but not having money destroys lives'' in *The Guardian*, 22 June, 2020 <<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2020/jun/22/martin-lewis-having-money-is-not-happiness-but-not-having-money-destroys-lives>> [accessed 23 June 2020].

³⁹⁸ Martin, p. 369.

are being won by consumers actually taking companies up on their offers of refunds if dissatisfied with their purchases. However, there is little evidence of this; to make a spectacle of the mundane, of the everyday aspects of the lives of many who long before and long after Laurette's *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* rely on seeking out promotions for their means to survival seems perverse. In the same sense that Laurette's work tows the line between exchange(s) and relations, societal contradictions and capitalist-anxieties, it does so yet again, in the context of appropriating the lived experiences of those for whom collecting coupons is not an artistic 'project', nor subversive in the slightest. Returning to an earlier statement, then, that 'there ain't no such thing as a free lunch,' it seems that in discussions of Laurette's *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products*, that maybe there is such a thing, it just requires asking for a receipt and waiting for the right moment to ask for a reimbursement.

Part IV

‘Relational’ Time: Making a Case for *contretemps*

Towards the end of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *Le Petit Prince*, the little prince meets a merchant. This meeting comes after the little prince travels around the universe where, along the way, he has encountered a whole host of characters who have taught him, and encouraged readers, to consider their own existence and relationships with others. Describing this meeting with the merchant, de Saint-Exupéry writes:

This was the merchant who sold pills that had been invented to quench thirst. You need only swallow one pill a week, and you would feel no need of anything to drink.

“Why are you selling those?” asked the little prince.

“Because they save a tremendous amount of time,” said the merchant. “Computations have been made by experts. With these pills, you save fifty-three minutes in every week.”

“And what do I do with those fifty-three minutes?”

“Anything you like...”

“As for me,” said the little prince to himself, “if I had fifty-three minutes to spend as I liked, I should walk at my leisure toward a spring of fresh water.”³⁹⁹

Today, de Saint-Exupéry’s tale is considered a classic of twentieth century French literature; a children’s book recommended to adults for its mediations on human nature – a contemporary fable of sorts. This chapter is not concerned with the nuances or legacies of children’s literature, so what is the relevance of *Le Petit Prince* to a reconsideration of *Relational Aesthetics*? In this dialogue there are a few things to note: firstly, there is the act of exchange – the little prince encounters a person who is offering goods in exchange for capital, whatever capital looks like on the planet on which the little prince finds himself at that given moment. In the previous chapter, the idea of exchange was explored. More specifically, the ways in which exchange in interhuman relationships manifests itself both within and outside of the *sphere* of what can be loosely described as ‘relational’ art. The little prince’s dialogue with the merchant touches on similar themes too, but here it is not the focus on exchange that is important, but the focus on time. The unique selling point of the merchant’s pills is that they offer the chance to ‘save a tremendous amount of time,’ but, as the little prince asks, what is the point of saving the precious ‘fifty-three minutes in every week’?⁴⁰⁰ As the merchant responds, those saved minutes can be spent doing ‘anything you like,’ with such an answer implying that the consumer of these pills has a degree of autonomy over the ways in which they might *choose* to *spend* these *saved* minutes. In this instance, it is time that can be bought; it is time which is the commodity that people desire. For the little prince, it is these extra fifty-three minutes

³⁹⁹ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, trans. by Katherine Woods (London: Egmont, 2009), pp. 71-72.

⁴⁰⁰ de Saint-Exupéry, p. 72.

that will be spent walking at his 'leisure toward a spring of fresh water'.⁴⁰¹ The theme of 'time', how it can be bought and spent, how it might be organised, and how it can be considered distinct from other temporal formats (e.g., 'leisure') is integral to this dialogue. This brief interaction between the little prince and the merchant is indicative of attitudes towards time in modern and contemporary society. Temporal formats, the ways in which the charting and *spending* of time has altered according to industrial capitalism; the introduction of clock-time; the separation between time afforded to 'work' and 'leisure': all of these issues, and more besides, are closely tied to the conditions in which *Le Petit Prince* was produced. And, as this chapter argues, it is a shared interest in questioning 'time', rather than of facilitating *les relations interhumaines* that links many of the artworks initially described by Bourriaud as 'relational'.

What follows in this chapter is not a rerun of the debates in the preceding chapters. As mentioned before, the idea of 'relational' art has been subjected to critiques which, for the most part, focus on the flaws associated with the nature of exchange and conviviality that the art itself supposedly advocates. It has been argued, by none other than Bourriaud himself, that the common thread between so-called 'relational art (other than *its* 'relationality') is its ability to produce 'a specific sociability,' a sociability which creates 'free areas [...] suggest[ing] other trading possibilities'.⁴⁰² Here, there are no discussions of whether it is even possible for 'relational' art to harness a capacity for alternate forms of exchange, or of whether Bourriaud's iteration of 'relational' art offers too narrow a view of such artworks. Instead, this chapter *reconsiders Relational Aesthetics* through focusing on an aspect of 'relational' art that has seldom being studied, this aspect being a shared interest in the concept of 'time'. The art first described by Bourriaud as 'relational' is undoubtedly concerned with *les relations interhumaines*, but it is also concerned with questioning temporal formats that shape the organisation of daily life. To demonstrate this, this chapter begins by reassessing some of the pivotal 'moments' and artworks now associated with the *birth* of relational art. Although the *emergence* of 'relational' art is often attributed to the 1996 exhibition 'Traffic', that took place in Bordeaux, this chapter focuses on the presence of time as an enduring theme in the work of the artists throughout the 1990s who eventually exhibited in 'Traffic'. By focusing on 'No Man's Time', an exhibition hosted in Nice in 1991, and the 1995 exhibition 'Le Labyrinthe moral' [*The Moral Maze*] that took place Dijon, which featured work by artists mentioned by Bourriaud, this chapter examines the context and scholarship surrounding these exhibitions that led to them retrospectively being interpreted as 'relational'. At certain points, this chapter relies on chronology, but moreso out of practicality than attempting to prove that 'No Man's

⁴⁰¹ de Saint-Exupéry, p. 72.

⁴⁰² Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 12; p. 16.

Time' + 'Le Labyrinthe moral' = 'Traffic' and *Relational Aesthetics*. As discussed in the previous chapters, it is all too easy to trace neat routes through histories that lead to a desired endpoint. Here, although chronology is employed at times, it is used to show the longstanding, or *durational*, interest in time(s) as a basis for many of the artworks and artists since ascribed the label of 'relational'. Although chronology is used to locate specific dates, it is also interrupted, with the conversations around exhibitions extending throughout the chapter, cropping up at regular intervals rather than being discussed in isolation and moved *past*. In discussing the multiple temporalities inherent to *Relational Aesthetics*, including the multiplicity of places, communities and 'events' or 'open-ended scenarios' in which 'relational' art has been, and continues to be presented, it is important for this to be reflected in the writing of these temporalities, too. In the same way that, as will be argued, the concept(s) of time(s) can be used to *reconsider Relational Aesthetics*, these concepts also manifest within the very structure of discussions that follow. Towards the end of this chapter, the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari will be used to explore the potentiality of 'relational' art as a multiplicity, according to their writings in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In their introduction, Deleuze and Guattari compare their presentation of knowledge to a map, a rhizomatic formation in which the interconnectedness of histories can be studied, thus resisting the linearity often applied to philosophy and history.⁴⁰³ Here, this chapter builds on this organisation of knowledge and history, to show the 'relationality' inherent to 'relational' art via the links in which they can be connected. Instead of focusing on the potential relationships encouraged by such artworks, this chapter focuses on shifting interpretations of works by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno as products of a shared and, in many cases, *enduring* interest in creating art based on questioning temporal formats under capitalism. Before starting this analysis, it is important to note that there is no intention to imply that the artists and artworks most closely associated with *Relational Aesthetics* have radically altered understandings of time(s), or advocated this cause in such a way that has made a distinct difference to contemporary attitudes towards time. This, as will be discussed, is a subject that has been championed far more fervently by figures elsewhere. Although this *reconsideration* of *Relational Aesthetics* is rooted in the context of French art and theory, here, the work of philosophers such as Antonio Negri will be consulted, alongside French counterparts including Jean-Luc Nancy, Alain Badiou and Daniel Bensaïd, amongst others, to contextualise debates surrounding the multiple temporalities, and potential for *contretemps* within 'relational' art. Through offering a revised analysis of time as a common thread that runs throughout much of the work first described as 'relational', this chapter argues that it is the concept of 'time(s)', not 'relationality' that links together the artworks included in *Relational Aesthetics*. By referring to the idea of *contretemps*, this chapter

⁴⁰³ See: Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

explores how 'relational art', rather than providing the futuristic 'modelling [of] possible universes', can instead facilitate a curious space, or perhaps an 'interstice' of sorts, that allows for time to be reconsidered in the context of so-called 'relational' art.⁴⁰⁴

Finding Time in *Relational Aesthetics*: 'No Man's Time'

'Traffic', the premier exhibition of 'relational' art, opened at CAPC, Bordeaux, in January 1996. Although Bourriaud had floated the idea of 'relational' art the previous year in an article published in *Documents sur l'art*, the opening of 'Traffic' offered a new opportunity to consider the participatory, or collaborative nature of work which he argued was a prominent feature of much contemporary art.⁴⁰⁵ For Bourriaud, the artwork on display in 'Traffic' 'highlight[ed] social methods of exchange, interactivity with the onlooker [...], and communication processes,' all of which, at the time, were considered characteristics of 'the work of art of the 1990s'.⁴⁰⁶ In subsequent analyses of the emergence of 'relational aesthetics', 'Traffic' has been a central focus for being the first explicitly 'relational' exhibition. 'Traffic' attempted to 'turn the onlooker into a neighbour and interlocutor,' and has, subsequently, been portrayed as a catalyst for the creation of work based on forming and facilitating social exchanges and relationships.⁴⁰⁷ This is not to say, however, that art prior to 'Traffic' had not encouraged sociability and participation, as noted by Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics* with the oft-quoted statement: 'art has always been relational in varying degrees'.⁴⁰⁸ Rather, 'Traffic' is remembered as a pivotal moment in which a wide array of artworks that shared an interest in facilitating human relationships were selected to be displayed together. Yet, this was not the first, or last instance, in which the work of supposedly 'relational' artists would be exhibited alongside each other. One such exhibition to feature the work of 'relational' artists including Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Pierre Joseph, amongst others, was 'No Man's Time', hosted at Villa Arson, Nice, in 1991 [Fig. 13]. In a pre-*Relational Aesthetics* world, the premise of 'No Man's Time' was to create an exhibition that revealed very little about the nature of the works on display, a decision that led to one critic arguing that the exhibition was 'unconvincing' at best.⁴⁰⁹ Although accompanied by a catalogue featuring essays by the exhibition's curator Éric Troncy, the then director of Villa Arson, Christian Bernard and Bourriaud, there is no mention of 'No Man's Time' being organised as a result of the work

⁴⁰⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁵ See: Nicolas Bourriaud, 'For a Relational Aesthetic (Part One)', *Documents sur l'art*, 7 (1995), unpaginated.

⁴⁰⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, 'An Introduction to Relational Aesthetics', trans. by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, 'Traffic' (Bordeaux: CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 1996), unpaginated.

⁴⁰⁷ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 17.

⁴⁰⁸ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 15.

⁴⁰⁹ Giorgio Verzotti, 'Review: 'No Man's Time'', trans. by Marguerite Shore, *Artforum*, 30:3 (1991), 148-149, (p. 148).

sharing any of the 'common characteristics' of relationality that would later be ascribed to works of art and artists included. Rather than the catalogue texts charting the shared interests of the works on display, there was a noticeable absence of a rationale for the show. Troncy suggested that the work featured in 'No Man's Time' was randomly selected without paying too much attention to the nuances of individual artists' works.⁴¹⁰ Perhaps as a result of this, during the exhibition's run from 6th July-30th September, 'No Man's Time' received criticism for its lack of clarity, a fault that would similarly be directed at 'Traffic' five years later.⁴¹¹ The lack of clarity and coherence also extended beyond the confines of the exhibition review to the exhibition catalogue itself. Or, as the art critic Giorgio Verzotti wrote in a review for *Artforum*, the texts included in the 'No Man's Time' catalogue were accused of 'all say[ing] the same thing,' and attempting to explain curatorial decisions by 'dreaming of cultural references that simply don't exist'.⁴¹² In response to the confusion, Troncy, a frequent collaborator of Bourriaud's and co-founder of *Documents sur l'art*, wrote a letter to the editors of *Flash Art* in which he 'claimed that ['No Man's Time'] was based on no particular concept and [was] without any theoretical scheme'.⁴¹³ If taking the view of the curator(s), then, it can be argued that these sentiments indicate an effort to position 'No Man's Time' as detached from pre-existing exhibition formats; a point that only serves to reinforce the idea that the work on display was selected at random, with little consideration of their possible commonalities. Through this shared lack of clarity and involvement of Bourriaud in varying degrees, it is unsurprising that since the publication of *Relational Aesthetics*, 'No Man's Time' has been examined as an exhibition that signalled the 'emergence' of 'relational' art. 'No Man's Time' and 'Traffic' were both featured in a recent publication surveying the 'most influential exhibitions of contemporary art,' with the former being described retrospectively as 'relational'.⁴¹⁴ Most recently, this subsequent analysis has been explored by the writer and curator Eli Diner who, when assessing Troncy's contribution to art of the 1990s, has argued that 'No Man's Time' has since

⁴¹⁰ See: Christian Bernard, ed., *No Man's Time* (Nice: Toscane et Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 1991).

⁴¹¹ See, for example, Emily Tsingou's review published in *Zing* in which the author describes the idea of 'relational' art as 'confusing to the casual visitor'. Emily Tsingou, 'Traffic', in *Zing*, 01 January 1997, <<http://zingmagazine.com/zing3/reviews.html>> [accessed 28 April 2018].

⁴¹² Verzotti, p. 149. Here, perhaps critics are referring to Philippe Parreno's work which was included in the exhibition. For 'No Man's Time', Parreno exhibited pieces from his series *No More Reality*, an ongoing, multimedia project in which the artist sought to question the nature of 'reality' through creating fictions and alternate realities. For further details of this project see: Hans Ulrich-Obrist and Philippe Parreno, *Philippe Parreno/Hans-Ulrich Obrist: Conversation Series* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008), pp. 95-97.

⁴¹³ John C Welchman, *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 30.; See also: Éric Troncy, 'No Man's Time', *Flash Art*, 6 (1991).

⁴¹⁴ Michael Archer, 'No Man's Time: Material Fantasies' in *theanyspacewhatever*, ed. by Nancy Spector (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publication, 2008), pp. 116-122, (p. 117). See also: Jens Hoffman, *Show Time: The 50 Most Influential Exhibitions of Contemporary Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014).

become 'recognised as an epochal contribution to what would become known as relational aesthetics'.⁴¹⁵ When reading reviews of 'No Man's Time' alongside Bourriaud's outline for a 'relational aesthetic' it is obvious as to why such comparisons have been made. In the same way that Troncy implied that the work on display in 'No Man's Time' was detached from attempts to theorise art, Bourriaud also suggested that 'relational' art had a degree of independence, or break, from previous art forms by stating that it 'is not the revival of any movement or comeback of any style'.⁴¹⁶ Although Bourriaud attempted to remedy the lack of theoretical underpinnings for 'relational' art in his 1998 publication by making vague references to Marx and the Situationist International, the concept of a 'relational aesthetic' remains largely unsubstantiated. This, as discussed in earlier chapters, results in claims of artworks which renounce, or attempt to resist theoretical intervention by occupying some form of separate realm from 'the system' – neither of which are ever properly defined.

Further similarities between the language used to describe the artwork in the two exhibitions can also be used to explain how 'No Man's Time' has, with hindsight, been labelled 'relational'. Although the 'No Man's Time' catalogue and its reviews make no mention of participatory practices or efforts being made to select and display artworks based on shared interests in facilitating relationships, there are specific references made to 'utopia', a theme on which Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* relies heavily. This topic was integral to Bourriaud's thesis, in which he suggested that previous artistic practices had only offered 'imaginary and utopian realities,' whereas 'relational' art attempted to move beyond these imagined realities by developing 'models of action within the existing real'.⁴¹⁷ Rather than creating *new* art forms, 'relational' art used pre-existing mediums alongside emerging digital technologies to present audiences with narratives that had a *tangible* outcome, or in some way offered solutions to pre-existing societal and theoretical concerns such as those raised by Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Inoperative Community*. According to Nancy there is an 'absence of community' in contemporary society which creates desire for new 'original' communities.⁴¹⁸ Nancy states that 'community means [...] that there is no singular being without another singular being'.⁴¹⁹ Nancy reaches this position by citing Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Focusing on *Dasein* (being-there), Nancy argues that subjects are only equipped to understand their *Dasein* through *Mitsein* (being-with) which entails a recognition of, and interaction with others; or as Heidegger explained, 'They [Others] are encountered from out of the *world* in which

⁴¹⁵ Eli Diner, 'Positively Not', *Flash Art*, 317 (2017), 96-99, (p. 97).

⁴¹⁶ Bourriaud, 'An Introduction to Relational Aesthetics', unpaginated.

⁴¹⁷ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 13.

⁴¹⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, et al (Oxford; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 60.

⁴¹⁹ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 28.

Dasein essentially dwells,' meaning that others 'are encountered in the *surrounding world*'.⁴²⁰ Building on Heidegger's ontology, Nancy suggests that the desire for community is immanent and refutes the paradigmatic claims of previous scholars that such a desire should be confined to studies of historical communities or hopes for future communities. Building on this, Nancy states there are no 'original' communities to be found within history and models for future communities are often based on a sense of nostalgia for imagined pasts that never *really* existed, much like the 'theoretical basis' for 'No Man's Time' according to Verzotti's review. By focusing on these imagined histories to inform imagined futures, contemporary society is situated in a state of limbo, in which uncertainty surrounding the present moment and needs for community are dismissed in favour of either historicising past models or envisioning future possibilities that are rooted in myth. However, as Nancy explains by referencing Georges Bataille, models for future communities remain elusive since the 'absence of community' is accompanied by the idea that there is also an 'absence of myth,' a point refuted by both Bataille and Nancy.⁴²¹ What is missing in contemporary societies that allows for new communities to be developed involves the distinct lack of urgency and ability to envisage alternatives in the present. In response to these calls for new communities based 'on "feelings" at the moment of sharing,' Bourriaud made an effort establish 'relational aesthetics' as a new idea within art that could be explored through already established practices.⁴²²

In its claims against being a 'revival' or 'comeback' of previous art forms, 'relational' art seems to offer a space in which social exchanges can be facilitated *now*, in the present. As Dohmen has argued, '[Bourriaud] is interested in the politics of the present, rather than the deferred happiness of tomorrow'.⁴²³ The objectives of this, other than supposedly being a new form of art, were cited as having the potential to initiate the creation of communities that, whatever the scale, could unite audiences, even if only for a 'split second' so as to form a 'micro-community'.⁴²⁴ Taking cues from developments in digital technology that were opening up new spaces for interaction, Bourriaud argued that 'relational' art, like the emergence of the

⁴²⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), p. 116.

⁴²¹ Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings of Surrealism*, ed. and trans. by Michael Richardson (London; New York: Verso, 1994), p. 48.

⁴²² B. C. Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 55. Bourriaud discusses the idea of reusing materials for artistic purposes in his 2002 publication *Postproduction*. See: Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002).

⁴²³ Dohmen, 'Towards a Cosmopolitan Criticality?', p. 39.

⁴²⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 17. Bourriaud uses the term 'micro-community' to discuss *Turkish Jokes*, an artwork devised by the Danish artist Jens Haaning that was exhibited in 'Traffic'. For this work, Haaning installed speakers in a suburb of Copenhagen with a large Turkish-speaking population and broadcast jokes in Turkish at regular intervals throughout the day. See: Vincent Pécoil, 'Jens Haaning,' in *Hi My Name is Jens Haaning*, ed. by Jens Haaning and Vincent Pécoil (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2003), pp. 150-159.

internet, 'points to a collective desire to create new areas of conviviality'.⁴²⁵ Considering this, it could be argued that 'relational' art's attempts to open up opportunities for sociality, and to provide spaces for new communities that can be analysed in accordance with Nancy's model which 'extends far beyond the theme of man as a social being'.⁴²⁶ This is a crucial element influencing the retrospective analyses of 'No Man's Time' as an exhibition of 'relational' art. Despite refuting claims of 'relational' art as 'utopian' in its ambitions, artworks associated with Bourriaud's idea have continued to be described as such. Take, for example, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, an artist with a longstanding interest in creating alternative spaces based on scenes from films and novels. Her contribution to 'No Man's Time', titled *Son esprit vert fit autour d'elle un monde vert, 1^{re} et 2^e partie* [*Her green mind made a green world around her, part 1 and 2*] (1991), was a multimedia work comprised of a table and chairs with photographs hung on an adjacent wall; no wall texts were provided and there was no signage preventing the audience from interacting with the artwork itself [Fig. 14]. The decision as to whether to sit at the table and examine the photographs was left up to the audience. Although the audience was invited to make a choice regarding their interaction with the artwork (a decision which, to a certain extent, is made whenever a viewer enters a gallery and decides which artworks they *choose* to view), Gonzalez-Foerster's work was criticised at the time. The basis for such criticism was to be found in the transparency of the project, with an *Artforum* critic arguing that *Son esprit vert*, whilst presenting audiences with the opportunity to make a 'personal choice' only permitted such actions by disguising the wider intention of the project which 'subscribed to utopian politics'.⁴²⁷ Although the critic did not elaborate on the nature of 'utopian' politics, it seems that any effort to allow viewers the chance to develop new communities in spaces especially designed for these encounters was treated with suspicion. Such a criticism was later applied to *Relational Aesthetics*, with Bishop arguing that the audience for 'relational' work, rather than being treated as a 'one-to-one relationship between work of art and viewer,' instead focuses on addressing viewers as a 'collective, social entity [...], however temporary or utopian this may be'.⁴²⁸ Whilst Gonzalez-Foerster's subsequent work has attempted to question fictional narratives through multi-media installations, critics have continually referred to the work as 'relational'.⁴²⁹ Following a recent retrospective at the Centre Pompidou critics referred to the 'legacy of relational aesthetics' present throughout Gonzalez-Foerster's work,

⁴²⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 26.

⁴²⁶ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 28.

⁴²⁷ Verzotti, p. 149.

⁴²⁸ Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (2004), 51-79, (p. 54).

⁴²⁹ For example, 2008 installation at Tate Modern *TH.2058*, Gonzalez-Foerster imagined how artworks might be preserved in the future by transforming the Turbine Hall into a shelter to house these objects, including sculptures by Louise Bourgeois, Alexander Calder and Bruce Nauman. On the occasion of her exhibition at the 303 Gallery, New York, in 2014, Gonzalez-Foerster was described as 'a heavyweight of relational aesthetics'. See: Smith, 'Art in Review – Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster: 'euquinimod & costumes''. [accessed 14 October 2018].

and made references to the ways in which the installations harked ‘back to those happy days of relational aesthetics’.⁴³⁰ Although the structures for her art may have changed, work such as Gonzalez-Foerster’s that was initially described as ‘utopian’ in ‘No Man’s Time’ has struggled to escape the label of ‘relational’ since the appearance of *Relational Aesthetics* in the mid-1990s.

‘Le Labyrinthe moral’

In 1995 twelve artists were invited to participate in ‘Le Labyrinthe moral’ [*The Moral Maze*], an exhibition hosted by Le Consortium in Dijon. Devised by the artists Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno, whose work had also been exhibited together in ‘No Man’s Time’, ‘Le Labyrinthe moral’ was a project where the curators invited a group of participants to contribute to their forthcoming project.⁴³¹ When explaining the concept of ‘Le Labyrinthe moral’, Gillick and Parreno asked artists to ‘view the exhibition as an ‘investigative model’ and ‘collective space,’ one ‘where it [was] possible to ask questions about the greatest number of domains parallel to their ideas’.⁴³² In response to the curator’s calls, a number of artists chose to collaborate on their respective projects. For example, Pierre Huyghe’s contribution, *L’Association des Temps Libérés* [The Association of Freed Time], was a not-for-profit society in which all of the artists involved in the exhibition were founding members, with the society forming the basis for *The House or Home?*, a proposal devised by Huyghe and Parreno that was exhibited in the galleries at Le Consortium; Maurizio Cattelan and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster founded *Permanent Food*, a biannual art publication focusing on artistic collaboration, photography and altering pre-existing images which remained in print until 2007; and, ‘Le Labyrinthe moral’ was the first of many collaborations between Gillick and Parreno. These collaborations are, in part, what led critics to focus on ‘Le Labyrinthe moral’ as a precursor to ‘Traffic’ and *Relational Aesthetics*. For example, in 2008 the Guggenheim, New York, hosted an exhibition titled ‘the theanyspacewhatever’, which featured many of the artists mentioned by Bourriaud in his 1998 publication who had exhibited alongside each other in ‘No Man’s Time’, ‘Le Labyrinthe moral’ or ‘Traffic’, if not all.⁴³³ Given this, there is little surprise that critics described ‘the

⁴³⁰ Pierre-Alexandre Mateos, ‘Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster *Centre Pompidou / Paris*’, *Flash Art*, 305 (2015), 101, (p. 101); Pernille Albrethsen, ‘Dress for the Future,’ in *Kunstkritikk*, 21 November 2015 <<http://www.kunstkritikk.no/wpcontent/themes/KK/ajax/general/print.php?id=71859&r=0.09570529498159885>> [accessed 17 January 2018].

⁴³¹ The artists invited to participate included: Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Douglas Gordon, Lothar Hempel, Carsten Höller, Pierre Huyghe, Paul Ramirez-Jonas, Jorge Pardo, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Xavier Veilhan.

⁴³² Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno, ‘The Moral Maze,’ in *Le Consortium*, 22 June 1995 <<http://leconsortium.fr/expositions-exhibitions/moral-maze/>> [accessed 11 April 2018].

⁴³³ All of the artists featured in ‘the theanyspacewhatever’ had had their work featured in at least two of the following exhibitions ‘No Man’s Time’, ‘Le Labyrinthe moral’ and ‘Traffic’. These artists include: Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Douglas Gordon, Carsten Höller, Pierre Huyghe, Jorge Pardo, Philippe Parreno and Rirkrit Tiravanija.

'theanyspacewhatever' as a 'survey of relational art'.⁴³⁴ Such a sentiment was only fueled by further reviews, with art critic Jerry Saltz suggesting that 'relational' artists had 'created the most influential stylistic strain to emerge in art since the early '70s'.⁴³⁵ Skeptical of this attempt to historicise 'relational' art as a *style*, Brian Sholis noted that "'Le Labyrinthe moral' and 'Traffic' were, in varying ways, associated with 'relational aesthetics,' describing 'theanyspacewhatever' as taking 'one of the first shaky steps towards imposing a historical structure upon the seemingly untameable aesthetic proliferations of the decade just past'.⁴³⁶ In attempting to cement a coherent trajectory for 'relational' art, it seems that the characteristics associated with such art became of lesser importance, with the focus on such artwork instead being transferred onto a select group of artists regardless of the nature of the work being produced since the 1990s. Or, as Sholis surmised, the publication of *Relational Aesthetics* only led to further confusion surrounding contemporary art practices 'as 'relational aesthetics' became a label applied to nearly any artistic gesture, however unsubtle, that actively engaged viewer-participants'.⁴³⁷

Throughout 'Le Labyrinthe moral's seven week run, external speakers were invited to the gallery. These included management specialists, economists and experts in public speaking with the aim of offering the artists involved opportunities to expand the parameters of their practice. Referred to as 'witnesses,' the presence of the external speakers gave the artists a chance to conduct research in an environment described by Gillick as 'clearly focused on fact finding in relation to moments of critical judgement within parallel activities'.⁴³⁸ Here, it is interesting to consider the extent to which 'Le Labyrinthe moral' can be understood as an exhibition of 'relational' art since, as with 'No Man's Time', it has only been considered as 'relational' retrospectively. Although some of the works on display were the result of social exchanges and collaborations between the artists involved, the nature of 'Le Labyrinthe moral' remained confined to the gallery and a select group of participants. This manifested itself in a number of ways, but most notably in the ambiguity surrounding the accessibility and openness of the events involving the external speakers. As one critic noted: 'Each of them [the external speakers] spent the day with the artists and had to leave before the next contributor arrived.

⁴³⁴ Reckitt, p.132.

⁴³⁵ Jerry Saltz, 'Night at the Museum', in *New York magazine*, 9 November 2008 <<http://nymag.com/arts/art/features/51998/#>> [accessed 13 April 2018].

⁴³⁶ Brian Sholis, "'theanyspacewhatever' at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,' in *Afterall*, 5 February 2009 <<http://www.afterall.org/online/theanyspacewhatever.at.the.solomon.r.guggenheim.museum#.WCSAHBSZK7Y>> [accessed 06 April 2018].

⁴³⁷ Sholis, [accessed 06 April 2018].

⁴³⁸ Liam Gillick, 'Distraction,' in *Exploding Aesthetics*, ed. by Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B. V., 2001), pp. 139-144, (p. 143). Gillick has since described the influence of *The Moral Maze* as the catalyst for 'a very precise and profound shift' in his work.

The exhibition was not closed to the public, but was not unmistakably open, either'.⁴³⁹ This anecdote, which was also confirmed by Gillick, the show's co-curator, seems at odds with Bourriaud's claims for works by artists associated with 'relational' art.⁴⁴⁰ As he argued in *Relational Aesthetics*:

Their works involve methods of social exchanges, interactivity with the viewer within the aesthetic experience being offered to him/her, and the various communication processes, in their tangible dimension as tools serving to link individuals and human groups together.⁴⁴¹

Given the focus on the interaction with the viewer as an integral factor to 'relational' art it is peculiar that an environment devised to encourage the sharing of ideas and discussion was not obviously accessible to visitors. However, this reliance on art galleries as *the* space for exhibiting and facilitating such art is one of the main critiques to which *Relational Aesthetics* has been subjected. The 'relational' exhibitions 'No Man's Time' and 'Le Labyrinthe moral' were both organised to take place within a gallery, the exception here being 'Traffic' since several of the exhibits took place off site, such as the guided bus tour of the industrial centres of Bordeaux organised by Pierre Huyghe. This reliance on the gallery is something which has caused critics like Bishop to challenge the supposed 'democratic' nature of 'relational' art. Whilst others have questioned the impact of 'relational' art as being determined by 'a wider network of arts organizations, museums, art schools, dealers, publications, critics, etc. who collectively constitute the socially sanctioned art world'.⁴⁴² Or, to quote Marstine, 'relational aesthetics remains sequestered in the white cube of the gallery space'.⁴⁴³ Such criticism was foreseen by Bourriaud and addressed in *Relational Aesthetics*. However, there is no mention of potential solutions to the issue of relating 'relational' art to contexts outside of the gallery, with him arguing that:

Their relational artistic practices have been repeatedly criticised. Because they are restricted to the space of galleries and art centres, they contradict the desire for sociability underpinning their meaning. They are also reproached for denying social conflict and dispute, differences and divergences, and the impossibility of communicating within an alienated social space, in favour, of an illusory and elitist modelling of forms of sociability, by being limited to the art world.⁴⁴⁴

⁴³⁹ Frieze, 'Review: Room with an Overview,' *Frieze*, 107 (2007), 132, (p. 132). See: Jean-Christophe Royoux, *Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 30 octobre 1998 – 10 janvier 1999* (Paris: Paris musées, 1998), p. 98.

⁴⁴⁰ See: Gillick, 'Distraction,' p. 141-143.

⁴⁴¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 43.

⁴⁴² Robert Pepperell, 'Art and Extensionism', in *Situated Aesthetics: Art Beyond the Skin*, ed. by Riccardo Manzotti (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2011), unpaginated (ebook).

⁴⁴³ Marstine, p. 16.

⁴⁴⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 81-82.

This is not to say that 'relational' art has to provide some form of blueprint for community engagement or be engaged in the 'social activism' analysed by Kester, nor must 'relational' art engage with institutional concerns regarding widening participation and outreach programmes.⁴⁴⁵ However, if 'relational' art provides viewers with tools that support linking 'individuals and human groups together,' it would be beneficial if these were *visible* and *available* to visitors, unlike the meetings that were a central focus of 'Le Labyrinthe moral'. Perhaps it is here that the contradictions of 'relational' art are most obviously displayed. How can art engage with an audience and encourage new forms of social exchanges when the context in which 'relational' art is exhibited is abundant with coded forms of interaction and sociality?⁴⁴⁶ In the efforts to reconsider the ways in which art can be social and encourage *active* participation, the importance of coherence and comfort in these settings seems to have been forgotten. Or, as Hal Foster notes in his analysis of *Relational Aesthetics*, 'entire exhibitions are often given over to messy juxtapositions of projects,' the effects of which are often 'more chaotic than communicative.'⁴⁴⁷

This concern surrounding communicability and openness are also present in 'relational' artworks designed to take place outside of the gallery. For example, as part of their collaboration for 'Le Labyrinthe moral' Huyghe and Parreno devised *The House or Home?* This was the first project to emerge out of the recently founded not-for-profit organisation *L'Association des Temps Libérés*. For *The House or Home?* Huyghe and Parreno invited a group of people to live together in an unfinished property in need of renovation to be deemed habitable. In Huyghe and Parreno's view, the renovations required for *The House or Home?* were 'not a question of inventing a new architectural form,' but rather a means in which they could attempt to 'find a mode of cohabitation'.⁴⁴⁸ The proposal intended for participants to work together to make the property habitable, with each person contributing in whatever way they felt necessary; there would be no site foreman to delegate or oversee tasks, and no schedule to work towards. Through doing this it was hoped that the dwelling could provide a 'platform' for participants to collaborate that would be 'ready to be activated without a plan'.⁴⁴⁹ As with other projects described as 'relational' which featured in 'No Man's Time' and 'Traffic', the ambition to facilitate a space in which people work together to improve their living conditions implies that the main objective of 'relational' art was to encourage a building of a new

⁴⁴⁵ See: Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, CA.; London: University of California Press, 2004).

⁴⁴⁶ For further information on this topic see chapter one for a discussion of Claire Bishop's criticisms of Bourriaud's assumption that 'relational' art encourages 'democratic participation' in relation to Chantal Mouffe's writing on agonism.

⁴⁴⁷ Hal Foster, 'Arty Party', *London Review of Books*, 25:23 (2003), 21-22, (p. 21).

⁴⁴⁸ Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno, 'Freed-Time Association, (1995)', in *Pierre Huyghe*, ed. by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (Milano: Skira, 2004), 294-295, (p. 294).

⁴⁴⁹ Amelia Barikin, *Parallel Presents: The Art of Pierre Huyghe* (Cambridge, MA.; London: MIT Press, 2012), p. 47.

community, much like those considered critical to developing society by Nancy. Yet, in spite of this, Huyghe and Parreno suggested that, although the project would rely on a group of people with a vast range of skills so as to make the dwelling habitable, their main objective was to focus on the 'singularity of each participant'.⁴⁵⁰ In addition to this, rather than *The House or Home?* focusing on establishing wider relationships, those invited to participate, much like those invited to attend the seminars at 'Le Labyrinthe moral', were from a pre-established group. The invited participants were made up of the founding members of *L'Association des Temps Libérés*, all of whom had their work in 'Le Labyrinthe moral' and had pre-existing relationships with one another. This led the critic George Baker, who has written extensively on Huyghe's and Parreno's practices, to question the supposed 'relationality' of *The House or Home?* suggesting that when discussing the project 'we are more often than not talking about a group of friends'.⁴⁵¹ For Baker, this is symptomatic of many of the conversations surrounding 'relational' art and *Relational Aesthetics*, suggesting that 'the "sociality" discussed by recent critics and curators and artists seems to amount to little more than friendship,' making the idea of 'collaboration as an increasingly dominant recipe for exhibitions and art practice today problematic'.⁴⁵² As with the seminars at 'Le Labyrinthe moral', the opportunity of participating in *The House of Home?* was rooted in pre-established relationships and closed spaces, making such projects embody the format of a weekend writing retreat rather than the 'opening of space to unlimited discussion,' envisioned by Bourriaud.⁴⁵³ Here, it is worth asking what it takes to get an invite to 'relational' art?

So, why it is significant that 'No Man's Time' and 'Le Labyrinthe moral', both of which predate 'Traffic' and the publication of *Relational Aesthetics* are included in this discussion? As mentioned, both of these exhibitions featured artists that have been associated with 'relational' art, and, in light of Bourriaud's publication and its dissemination in Anglophone circles, these two exhibitions have been described, retrospectively, as 'relational'. As a result, most of the artwork featured in 'No Man's Time', 'Le Labyrinthe moral' and 'Traffic' has been analysed in relation to exchange, but, as highlighted in the previous chapter, Bourriaud's ambition for 'relational' art to create exchanges outside of capitalism is fundamentally flawed through its lack of theoretical grounding and reliance on 'the system' to support its very existence. This issue of 'relationality' being 'the common point, or the intersection, between the artists that were working [in the 1990s] and those who were working together,' is only further complicated when considering how many of the artists whose work was included in 'No Man's Time', 'Le Labyrinthe moral' and 'Traffic' have since refuted this claim.⁴⁵⁴ For instance,

⁴⁵⁰ Huyghe and Parreno, p. 294.

⁴⁵¹ George Baker, 'An Interview with Pierre Huyghe', *October*, 110 (2004), 80-106, (p. 100).

⁴⁵² Baker, p. 101; p. 89.

⁴⁵³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 15.

⁴⁵⁴ Bourriaud, 'Nicolas Bourriaud About Relational Art' [accessed 13 March 2018].

Huyghe has been quoted as saying: 'I don't accept it [relational aesthetics] as a term to describe a set of practices including my own';⁴⁵⁵ Gillick is reported to have slammed the phone down on a television producer when asked to participate in a BBC4 documentary seeking to define *Relational Aesthetics*, and even the artists who were featured in the documentary like Rirkrit Tiravanija and Parreno denied their affiliations with 'relational' art –when asked how his *Untitled* (2002) series of sculptures created relationships and facilitated dialogue, Parreno simply replied 'they don't'.⁴⁵⁶ Such remarks beg the following questions: If the artworks are not wholly 'relational' then what characteristics do they share, if any? And how can art of the 1990s be interpreted in light of the abundant criticism directed at *Relational Aesthetics*? Ultimately, if the 'relational' is taken out of 'relational art' then what is left? These questions are not posed so as to deny *all* of the claims made in *Relational Aesthetics*, rather, these provocations seek to question the extent to which art forms from the 1990s that have been interpreted as 'relational' *actually* share an interest in facilitating new communities and spaces for sociability as their central focus. The intention here, then, is to question Bourriaud's definition and ask whether it is possible to understand the vast and diverse array of artworks exhibited throughout the 1990s solely on the 'basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt'?⁴⁵⁷ The answer, of course, is no. However, although there are issues in defining the relationality and questions surrounding how integral the nature of exchange is to such artworks, there is another common thread which unites artwork described as 'relational' and it is *not* the possibility of encouraging participation or sociability. Instead, will be discussed, the key characteristic shared by the artworks that have been retrospectively and continue to be ascribed the label of 'relational,' is rooted in a longstanding interest in time(s), particularly in relation to broadening the possibilities of exhibitions through open-ended scenarios, durational practices and challenges to the temporalities of everyday life.

A History of Time in *Relational Aesthetics*

So, how is time relevant to *Relational Aesthetics*? The concept(s) of time(s) and issues which arise from it has informed much of the work produced by the artists associated with *Relational Aesthetics*, both before Bourriaud's publication and in their subsequent practice. At times, this has resulted in installations that imagine conditions of the future (Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's Turbine Hall installation at Tate Modern, *TH. 2058*, 2008); experimenting with the duration of exhibitions (Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno, 'Le Labyrinthe moral', 1995; 2014); and efforts to interrogate ideas of repetition, recognition and memory (Douglas Gordon, 24

⁴⁵⁵ Pierre Huyghe in George Baker and Pierre Huyghe, 'An Interview with Pierre Huyghe', *October*, 110 (2004), 80-106, (p. 100).

⁴⁵⁶ Lewis [accessed 16 January 2017].

⁴⁵⁷ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 113.

Hour Psycho, 1993). Time has consistently appeared as a theme in Bourriaud's own writing and curatorial practice too. Whilst his attempts to explicate a theory of relationality based on exchange have generally been viewed with scepticism, audiences have generally been receptive of Bourriaud's projects that have explicitly sought to address how time(s) is experienced in contemporary culture. For example, considering the 2005 Lyon Biennale that was curated by Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans. The 2005 Lyon Biennale was titled 'Expérience de la durée' [*Experiencing Duration*] and ran for four months from 14th September-31st December. According to Bourriaud and Sans' catalogue text, the biennale was an opportunity to consider and contextualise the output of artists working in the 1990s for whom 'time represents a material of construction more than a simple protocol'.⁴⁵⁸ The Lyon Biennale featured some of the artists whose work had been exhibited in 'No Man's Time', 'Le Labyrinthe moral' and 'Traffic', including Huyghe, Parreno and Tiravanija alongside the likes of Daniel Buren, Olafur Eliasson and Ann Veronica Janssens. Where *Relational Aesthetics* created confusion, efforts to engage with the nature of time generally roused praise for its clarity, with reviewers celebrating the coherence of the biennale in which 'all of the selected works had a direct relation to time'.⁴⁵⁹ As one critic noted, the following topics were addressed by the art on display: 'passing time', 'suspended time', 'seasons', 'tempos' and 'action time'.⁴⁶⁰ Unlike previous exhibitions of 'relational' art, 'Expérience de la durée' was widely acknowledged as a success, with the review in *Frieze* stating: If 'Expérience de la durée' succeeds (and it does), it is because it offers alternative temporalities to the speedy capitalist trajectory that shapes so much of our lives'.⁴⁶¹ It is this point, relating to multiple temporalities, that is central to much of the work described as 'relational'. For the time being though, the focus of this chapter is to situate the various enquiries and artistic projects concerned with time within artistic practices of the 1990s. This is not to say that this is a new observation, as evidenced by critics of the aforementioned exhibitions, however, until this point there has been no comprehensive analysis of the presence of time(s) within 'relational' art. In the analysis that follows, Bourriaud's work, which argues that 'relational' art is based on the premise 'of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt,' will be *reconsidered* to propose that concept(s) of time(s) not *les relations interhumaines* tends to be used as a medium and basis for much of the work described as 'relational'.⁴⁶² This, as will be argued, feeds into a wider

⁴⁵⁸ Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans, 'Expérience de la durée', in *Biennale de Lyon* <<http://2005.labiennaledelyon.com/fran/movie.htm>> [accessed 18 April 2018].

⁴⁵⁹ Hervé Gauville, 'Biennale de Lyon. Le temps saisi', in *Liberation*, 14 September 2005 <http://next.liberation.fr/culture/2005/09/14/biennale-de-lyon-le-temps-saisi_532250> [accessed 18 April 2018].

⁴⁶⁰ Gauville, accessed 18 April 2018].

⁴⁶¹ Tom Morton, 'Review: Lyon Biennale', in *Frieze*, 14 November 2005 <<https://frieze.com/article/lyon-biennial-0?language=en>> [accessed 16 October 2016].

⁴⁶² Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 113.

thesis which suggests that this interest in time is both a ‘theoretical and practical point of departure’, for ‘relational’ art, much of which is a product of its creation in the context of French society in the 1990s.⁴⁶³

Ongoing Interactions and ‘Open-Ended Scenarios’

When examining the so-called ‘emergence’ of ‘relational’ art, from ‘No Man’s Time’ to ‘Traffic’ and beyond, there is very little mention of time in spite of overt allusions towards challenging temporal formats being present within the ‘relational’ artworks themselves. With the advent of the 1990s, there seemed to be a desire to reimagine the nature of exhibitions and the ways in which they were organised, presented and understood. Such ambitions manifested themselves in various ways throughout the 1990s, and in particular in the exhibitions that have been retrospectively described as ‘relational’. In 1991 when Éric Troncy curated ‘No Man’s Time’ at Villa Arson, Nice, he explained that the exhibition had been organised around ‘no particular concept’ and ‘without any theoretical scheme’.⁴⁶⁴ This position was taken in response to Troncy’s objections to ‘thematic group shows,’ which he felt were ‘weighed down by a theme, resulting in an illustrative outcome’.⁴⁶⁵ ‘No Man’s Time’ sought to offer an alternative proposition, one which involved a renunciation of the authorial stance of the curator, seeking instead to ‘delegate to the artists the collective responsibility for the exhibition in its entirety’.⁴⁶⁶ In inviting artists to configure an exhibition and display work without responding to a particular theme, Troncy hoped to move away from exhibitions from the 1980s which he later argued ‘reduced’ displays of art to ‘mere showrooms’.⁴⁶⁷ By delegating the organisation of ‘No Man’s Time’ to the artists, making the project a ‘collaborative’ effort à la *Relational Aesthetics*, Troncy invited those involved to propose schedules, activities and curatorial suggestions. One suggestion which indicated the burgeoning interest in time(s) amongst artists in the early 1990s, was the proposal to alter the exhibition dates. Although the exhibition was on display across the whole of Villa Arson (in the studios, galleries, gardens, corridors and lecture theatres) between specific dates in July and September, the exhibition actually began a month earlier in June. To explore the idea of the exhibition as an ‘open-ended’ scenario, all of the 22 artists involved began working together four weeks before ‘No Man’s Time’s official opening date, living together in Nice as a precursor to the exhibition to maximise the chances for collaborative work. In the weeks leading up to the July opening of ‘No Man’s Time’, the artists lived, cooked, socialised and created work together, with a few of

⁴⁶³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 113.

⁴⁶⁴ Welchman, p. 30; Troncy, ‘No Man’s Time’.

⁴⁶⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Dictatorship* (London; New York: Verso, 2012), p. 207.

⁴⁶⁶ Éric Troncy, ed., *Surface de réparations* (Dijon: FRAC Bourgogne, 1994), p. 12.

⁴⁶⁷ Troncy, ‘No Man’s Time’.

the participants recording details of the events which were then published in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition. Since then, 'No Man's Time' has been described as attempting to facilitate relationships, and certain aspects of the exhibition draw close comparisons to later projects that require a certain level of collaboration; for example, the artists cohabiting in Nice before 'No Man's Time' bears similarities to *The House or Home?* (1995) to the extent that participants were also being invited to live together for a period of time, albeit with different purposes – the artists in 'No Man's Time' lived together in the build up to an exhibition whilst those involved in *The House or Home?* would seek to reimagine the nature of the working day by making a collaborative effort to renovate a property. Both aspects of these projects bear trademarks of Bourriaud's 'relational' art, yet the degree of audience participation and extent to which these works elicit social exchanges when being viewed in a gallery can be questioned. As Bishop notes, the audience would only be privy to the fact that the artists featured in 'No Man's Time' lived together as part of an 'ongoing interaction' if they purchased a catalogue or if 'they were fortunate enough to be invited to the opening night'.⁴⁶⁸ Although there are complexities surrounding the spaces which 'relational' art has tended to occupy, i.e. remaining within the confines of white-walled galleries and art fairs, here it is interesting to note that this critique of 'No Man's Time' incorporates both an interest in time (as 'ongoing') and relationality ('interaction'), yet, it is the latter point to which critiques have more often than not been subjected.⁴⁶⁹

The idea of exhibitions and artworks as 'ongoing interactions' is a recurring theme that appears throughout many exhibitions in the 1990s. Despite Troncy's protestations against adhering to any 'particular concepts', 'No Man's Time' as a 'work-in-progress' has been mentioned in subsequent analyses of the exhibition, with critics suggesting that upon visiting the show the 'viewer was subject to an experience of incompleteness'.⁴⁷⁰ As Jennifer Bonnell and Roger I. Simon have stated, since the 1990s 'open-ended exhibitions have become increasingly common'.⁴⁷¹ In spite of this, the rise of *Relational Aesthetics* seems to have eclipsed any other ideas which have attempted to draw correlations between artistic practices at this time. Perhaps there is an easy explanation for this, insofar as the 'interactions' of

⁴⁶⁸ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 215.

⁴⁶⁹ See previous chapters for discussions of the problematic nature that spaces which 'relational' art has been exhibited and continues to be displayed within. Janet Marstine who has argued that the criticisms targeted at 'relational' art from Anglophone scholars is a result of the work emerging 'primarily from European practitioners ensconced in the Kunsthalle rather than the art gallery'. In pointing out the distinct differences in funding structures, education and curatorial practice, Marstine suggests that 'relational' art is better understood within a wider context which takes into account European frameworks for commissioning and displaying art. See: Janet Marstine, *Critical Practice: Artists, Museums, Ethics* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 15-22.

⁴⁷⁰ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 209.

⁴⁷¹ Jennifer Bonnell and Roger I. Simon, 'Difficult' Exhibitions and Intimate Encounters', *Museum and Society*, 5:2 (2007), 65-85, (p. 66).

'ongoing interactional' artworks are more *obvious* to the viewer. It can be argued, then, that the allusions towards creating communities and social exchanges are immediately apparent when confronted with textbook examples of what is now so often referred to as 'relational' art, however unsubstantial the theoretical grounding. For example, what discussion of *Relational Aesthetics* would be complete without mentioning Tiravanija's *Untitled* (1990-), the artist who has repeatedly been described as the 'poster boy for relational aesthetics'?⁴⁷² Tiravanija's now 'seminal' example of relational art, as defined by the curator and critic Nato Thompson in his recent survey of 'socially engaged art,' involves cooking the traditional dish of pad Thai for gallery visitors.⁴⁷³ The intention here is that providing visitors with free food (although how 'free' the food actually is depends on where the work is being exhibited; for example, in 2012 when staged at MoMA, New York, visitors would have paid an admission fee of between \$14 and \$25 before being permitted entry to the gallery where *Untitled* was being staged), and a space to sit and enjoy the meal that visitors would feel compelled to engage in social exchanges.⁴⁷⁴ In accordance with Bourriaud's texts, these instances aid in creating the 'micro-communities' which he envisioned as one of the purposes of *Relational Aesthetics*.⁴⁷⁵ Artworks such as Tiravanija's rely on audience participation and engagement, making their status as 'relational' seem duly justified. This sense of being confronted by the need for participation and allusions of sociability is also apparent in lesser-studied works, such as in Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's *Séances Biographiques [Biographical Sessions]* (1994; 1995; 2015). Gonzalez-Foerster invited gallery visitors to share biographical information and personal photographs in a structure that resembled one of the rooms for which she is now best-known. During the exhibition's run, *Séances Biographiques* encouraged participants to discuss their experiences and recall memories relating to information and images that they had provided. In Gonzalez-Foerster's work, as in Tiravanija's, there is an obvious need for audience participation, with the artist hoping that *Séances Biographiques* allows participants to work through their concerns and 'bring out a new version of the narrative of the self'.⁴⁷⁶ To this extent, the tendency to focus on the social exchanges or direct involvement of the audience over the interest in open-ended formats seems an obvious choice, yet such critiques ignore

⁴⁷² See: Andrew Berardini, 'Everything is Tiravanija's, But It's Also Yours', *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly*, 9:3 (2007), 66-70, (p. 66); Adam Geczy and Jacqueline Millner, *Fashionable Art* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2015), p. 97; Pablo Larios, 'U.F.O.-NAUT JK', *Frieze*, 156 (2013), 116-117, (p. 116).

⁴⁷³ Nato Thompson, *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2014), p. 31.

⁴⁷⁴ Carol Vogel, 'Museum of Modern Art Raising Admission and Membership Fees', in *The New York Times*, 28 July 2011 <<https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/07/28/museum-of-modern-art-raising-admission-and-membership-fees/>> [accessed 13 April 2018].

⁴⁷⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 17.

⁴⁷⁶ Emma Lavigne, ed., *Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster 1887-2058*, trans. by Charles Penwarden, Sarah-Louise Raillard and David Wharry (London; New York: Prestel Publishing, 2015), p. 204.

the fact that both works, as with many pieces and projects described as 'relational', have been staged multiples times across the world since first being displayed, thus encouraging the idea that such artworks can be perceived as 'ongoing interactions'.⁴⁷⁷ It has been suggested that 'open-ended' exhibitions 'can be frustrating or challenging for visitors,' since they 'may require visitors to engage in the process of confronting and dismantling their expectations and complicating their desire for a particular [exhibition] narrative'.⁴⁷⁸ This implies that it is 'easier' for audiences to understand that their involvement is crucial to the basis of 'relational' art and assumes a willingness on the part of the gallery visitor to participate in activities as this may be considered as a reason for attending an exhibition in the first place.⁴⁷⁹ However, this claim can be disputed because it disregards the confusion, and often the social embarrassment caused by asking visitors to *actively* engage with and be a part of the artworks on display. Or, as Dave Beech has suggested, 'Participation sounds promising only until you imagine the unpromising circumstances in which you might be asked to participate'.⁴⁸⁰

'Le Labyrinthe moral'

As with 'No Man's Time', 'Le Labyrinthe moral' was also considered to be an 'open-ended scenario'.⁴⁸¹ Initially conceived as 'an investigative model', the show's curators, Gillick and Parreno, encouraged the artists involved to consider the potential longevity of their contributions beyond the exhibition itself. This call stemmed from Gillick and Parreno's concerns about the 'definitive' nature of exhibition dates which they believed were problematic in the sense of offering a 'restrictive lifespan' to the works on display.⁴⁸² Rather than creating artworks solely for the intention of 'Le Labyrinthe moral', Gillick and Parreno asked their colleagues to think of the exhibition as a springboard for further opportunities in the future, again adhering to the idea of the exhibition as a work-in-progress and incomplete.⁴⁸³ For their

⁴⁷⁷ For example, Tiravanija's *Untitled*, since its first iteration in 1990 has been exhibited in New York at the 303 Gallery (1992; 1995), MoMA (2012); Chicago (1995) and in Bordeaux as part of 'Traffic' (1996), amongst other places. To date Gonzalez-Foerster's *Séances Biographiques* project has been enacted three times, including in 'L'Hiver de l'amour', Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, Paris (1994); 'Traffic', Bordeaux (1995); and, 'Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster 1857-2058', Centre Pompidou, Paris (2005).

⁴⁷⁸ Bonnell and Simon, p. 66.

⁴⁷⁹ Perhaps in some cases participating in particular art projects and interacting with artworks *is* a reason for attending galleries and exhibitions. For example, the Turbine Hall commissions at Tate Modern are a good example attracting visitors on the basis of interacting with works on display, such as Carsten Höller's slides in *Test Site* (2006-2007) and, more recently, Superflex's *One, Two, Three, Swing!* (2017-2018).

⁴⁸⁰ Dave Beech, 'Include Me Out', *Art Monthly*, 315 (2008), 1-4, (p. 4).

⁴⁸¹ Gillick and Parreno, [accessed 11 April 2018].

⁴⁸² Gillick and Parreno, [accessed 11 April 2018].

⁴⁸³ Such as approach draws parallels with the work of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) (1960-1968). As Lily Woodruff explores in her study of post-war participatory art in France, GRAV considered 'the objects that they produced not as finished artworks, but rather as research, they conceived of their process as a continual progression based on trial and error'. See: Woodruff, *Disordering the Establishment*, pp. 31-89.

contribution to 'Le Labyrinthe moral', Maurizio Cattelan and Gonzalez-Foerster founded *Permanent Food*, a magazine featuring artistic collaborations based around reusing images. Between 1995 and 2007 *Permanent Food* published a total of fifteen issues before temporarily halting production owing to the busy schedules of the projects' founders. In 2010, Gonzalez-Foerster left *Permanent Food*, Cattelan renamed the publication *Toilet Paper* and announced the photographer Pierpaolo Ferrari as the new collaborator for the project that is still ongoing. Although Cattelan infamously declared his 'retirement' from the art world following his retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in 2011, he continued to work on *Toilet Paper* throughout his self-imposed hiatus.⁴⁸⁴ Building on the *détournement* of the Situationist International almost forty years earlier, Cattelan and Gonzalez-Foerster declared that their magazine was 'copyright free' and used pre-existing photographs, images from newspapers and advertisements to create new, subversive imagery. As the critic Domenico Quaranta wrote, in *Permanent Food* 'everything is presented out of context, without references, cleaned out from its functional status of advertisement, work of art, amateurish creation, and from its own history'.⁴⁸⁵ In using pre-existing materials, and in some cases images that could be recognised by audiences, *Permanent Food* furthered the opportunity for 'ongoing interaction'. *Permanent Food* featured images that would resonate with a multitude of audiences. As just one example, the Panzani advert that was widely recognised in households across France in the 1950s and 60s was used at the basis for one of the images. Not only was this image popular in terms of its familiarity amongst consumers, but it was also central to Barthes' 'Rhetoric of the Image' essay, in which he introduced a new generation to semiotic analysis. Such an image, when incorporated alongside others in *Permanent Food*, can relate to the sharing of experiences across different time(s), from those who might remember seeing the advert first-hand or encountering it in theoretical texts in the 1960s, to those experiencing it in the present moment in the form of photomontage. Arguably, in this case, the 'relationality' of *Permanent Food* coincides with an interest in time(s). By reimagining and reconfiguring pre-existing images, the art featured in *Permanent Food* acts as a clear indicator of the 'open-ended scenarios' and 'ongoing interactions' by including a past (through the usage of pre-existing images and methods associated with early photomontage), a present (through the magazine format that is read and handled by the viewer), and a future (through the suggestions for future usage of the images and reminders of the ever-changing nature of reinterpretation).

⁴⁸⁴ Randy Kennedy, 'Hanging with Cattelan', in *The New York Times*, 29 September 2011 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/02/arts/design/maurizio-cattelan-retrospective-at-guggenheim.html>> [accessed 14 April 2018].

⁴⁸⁵ Domenico Quaranta, *AFK: Texts on Artists 2011-2016* (Brescia: LINK Editions, 2016), p. 78.

Another project created for 'Le Labyrinthe moral' in a similar vein was Huyghe's *L'Association des Temps Libérés* [The Association of Freed Time], a non-profit organisation with the objectives of 'developing unproductive time, reflecting on free time and developing a society without work,' through 'staging public meetings, events and celebrations'.⁴⁸⁶ On 12th June 1995, one week before the official opening of 'Le Labyrinthe moral', Huyghe founded *L'Association* with each of the artists taking part in the exhibition being named as founding members [Fig. 15]. From its inception *L'Association* sought to question the authority of and restrictions imposed by exhibition dates, a concern that Huyghe would later describe as influencing his practice in an effort to understand 'how one can free an exhibition from [its] temporal format'.⁴⁸⁷ Huyghe's society was officially founded on 12th June 1995 but it did not host its first public meeting until 22nd June, on the occasion of the opening of 'Le Labyrinthe moral' when all of the founding members were in attendance. In the ten days between *L'Association's* founding and its first public meeting, the society hosted its first general assembly between 18th-22nd June, an event which was advertised on posters in and around the exhibition, although no meetings or events are recorded as having happened. At this stage, there are three different dates associated with *L'Association's* initial activities. Unless in attendance or living in close proximity to Le Consortium, the founding of the society would not become public knowledge until early July when details of its activities were published in *Journal Officiel*, a French governmental publication that recognised the society as a non-profit organisation and provided details of the society's objectives and charitable status. In this sense, for those wanting to pinpoint specific dates for Huyghe's work, there are already a number different options available for *L'Association*, something that is further confused when, in an interview, the artist stated that the year 1990 should be considered as the 'official beginning' of his practice, thus making *L'Association* a product of five years' worth of research which would only continue during, and after, its 'official' founding in 1995.⁴⁸⁸ To engage with the call for 'open-ended scenarios,' *L'Association* became the basis for a number of artworks, such as Huyghe and Parreno's collaborative project *The House or Home?* (mentioned earlier in this chapter) and Huyghe's installation *Le procès du temps libre, Part I: Indices* [*The Trial of Free Time, Part I: Clues*] (1999) [Fig. 16], which sought to further interrogate the organisation of time under capitalism. Some of the foundations of Huyghe's contribution to 'Le

⁴⁸⁶ *Journal Officiel*, 127:7 (1995), unpaginated. Although *L'Association des Temps Libérés* was registered as a non-profit organisation this was not necessarily with the intention of doing charitable activities. Rather, the registered status of the organisation would make it exempt from being liable to pay certain taxes on some of its activities; for example, if buying a dwelling for *The House or Home?* (1995) project that is discussed later in this chapter.

⁴⁸⁷ Pierre Huyghe quoted in George Baker and Pierre Huyghe, 'An Interview with Pierre Huyghe', *October*, 110 (2004), 80-106, (p. 82).

⁴⁸⁸ Pierre Huyghe quoted in David Robbins, 'Warm Science Fictions,' in *Le Château de Turing au Pavillon français, 49e Biennale de Venise du 06.06 au 01.11.2001* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2003), p. 43.

Labyrinthe moral' were to question the experience of 'free time' and its relationship to L'Association's objectives of 'developing unproductive time, reflecting on free time and developing a society without work,' objectives which are still relevant today with *L'Association* still in operation.

As with other projects that emerged out of the 'open-ended scenarios,' it is worth noting that as an exhibition 'Le Labyrinthe moral' acts as an 'ongoing interaction'. As so-called 'relational' artworks have been restaged and continued since the 1990s, so too has 'Le Labyrinthe moral', which, to date, has been the format for three exhibitions in Dijon. Following its initial seven week run between 22nd June-12th August 1995 at Le Consortium, 'Le Labyrinthe moral' was moved to a different location in Dijon and re-staged later that year. After being moved to L'Usine, a performing arts centre which, although at the time of restaging was independent, is now a part of Le Consortium, a second iteration of *Le Labyrinthe moral* was displayed. The second exhibition opened on 4th November 1995 and remained on display until January of the following year. In the same way that so-called 'relational' art projects have been re-staged, the open-ended nature of 'Le Labyrinthe moral' was highlighted again in 2014 when its 'open-ended scenario' became the basis for a project for students at the *École du magasin*. In its latest presentation, students of the curatorial programme worked closely with Gillick to devise a way in which the open-ended scenarios of the 1995 exhibition could be preserved. Whilst the latest 'Le Labyrinthe moral' replicated some of the elements of the 1995 exhibition, such as the location and presence of external speakers described as 'witnesses', one thing that differed was the reception with critics emphasising the centrality of time to the exhibition within their reviews. As Claire Astier wrote, when experiencing 'Le Labyrinthe moral' it is necessary to ask: 'how do we appreciate the impact time has on our understanding of their [the artworks included in the 1995 exhibition] context?'⁴⁸⁹ A question which still remains largely unanswered.

Subsequent Scenarios

There are many examples of the artists associated with 'relational' art creating work that focuses on time both pre- and post-*Relational Aesthetics*. On a number of occasions Gillick has sought to further elaborate on the idea of the exhibition as an 'open-ended scenario,' a central feature of 'Le Labyrinthe moral' and his subsequent artistic and curatorial practice. For example, in 1996 Gillick published 'Il Tempo: The Corruption of Time in Recent Art', a short article in *Flash Art* which was followed up two years later by an essay expanding on the subject, titled 'Should the Future Help the Past?' Here, Gillick argues that recent art that is

⁴⁸⁹ Claire Astier, 'Time Capsule' in *École du magasin*, 2014 < <http://www.ecoledumagasin.com/session23/en/time-capsule-claire-astier/> > [accessed 17 April 2018].

interested in scenarios expresses a 'desire to play with time [...] in order to convey ideas without having to operate in real time'.⁴⁹⁰ The shared interest in time was also evident in 2007 in Hans Ulrich Obrist and Philippe Parreno's commission for the Manchester International Festival. As co-curators, Obrist and Parreno's project sought to answer the question 'what if a show were not about occupying space but rather occupying time?'⁴⁹¹ The title for the commission *Il Tempo del Postino* [Postman Time] was taken from considerations made by Parreno in '*Facteur Temps*' [Time Factor], an essay that he had written in 1994. In this essay, Parreno explores the conflicting nature of time spent in art galleries, arguing that although the viewer is left to decide how long they spend viewing a particular artwork, that the space in which an exhibition is hosted often 'dictates' the 'appropriate' amount of time which viewers spend *looking* at artworks on display.⁴⁹² Building on this idea of investigating the time audiences spend viewing artworks, Parreno developed 'postman time' for the Manchester commission, describing the concept as stemming from 'the idea that [the] exhibition is delivered to the audience rather than the audience walking through it in their own time'.⁴⁹³ Featuring the work of fifteen artists, including many of those whose work was featured in 'Traffic' like Eliasson, Huyghe, Gillick and Gordan, the event revolved around each artist taking to the stage of the Manchester Opera House to perform and exhibit their work over the course of an evening lasting three hours, in an event described by one critic as 'a temporal extravaganza'.⁴⁹⁴ As with previous 'open-ended scenarios' produced by these artists, *Il Tempo del Postino* was restaged in 2009 as part of the programme for Art Basel. When reflecting on the project, Obrist argued that it offered a 'rare' opportunity for visual art insofar as it 'behaved in the same way that theatre does: by dictating time'.⁴⁹⁵ However, this statement seems somewhat contradictory given that the 2009 re-staging of Obrist and Parreno's project took place over three days, rather than the original three hour performance in a single evening in Manchester, with exhibits being separated and shown in instalments during the evening of each day of the art fair. Whereas in its initial staging Obrist and Parreno felt that the art was dictating time, when displayed at Art Basel the timing of the shows was dictated by convenience. Rather than *Il Tempo del Postino* 'delivering' artworks according to the project's

⁴⁹⁰ Liam Gillick, 'Should the Future Help the Past?', *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, 0 (1998/1999), 104-109, (p. 106). See also: Liam Gillick, 'Il Tempo: The Corruption of Time in Recent Art', *Flash Art*, 188 (1996), 69-70.

⁴⁹¹ Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Conversation Series – Philippe Parreno* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2008), p. 68.

⁴⁹² Andrea Lissoni, *Philippe Parreno: Hypothesis* (Milano: Fondazione HangarBicocca, 2015), p. 32.

⁴⁹³ Philippe Parreno quoted in 'Il Tempo del Postino – A Group Show' in *The Telegraph*, 13 July 2007 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3675519/Il-Tempo-Del-Postino-A-Group-Show.html?image=7>> [accessed 21 April 2018].

⁴⁹⁴ Tim Adams, 'You're Having a Laugh – if only I was too' in *The Guardian*, 15 July 2007 <<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2007/jul/15/manchesterfestival2007.manchesterfestival?>> [accessed 21 April 2018].

⁴⁹⁵ Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (London: Penguin, 2015), p. 123.

initial schedule, the show was organised to fit around meetings between art dealers and clients, business dinners and networking receptions. Given the change in format of Parreno and Obrist's work at Art Basel, *Il Tempo del Postino* was transformed and the running order of the show was announced prior to the opening of the art fair to allow attendees to be able to choose which performance they wanted to attend. If, as the art historian Noah Horowitz has stated, 'the best collectors are those who ultimately buy *time*,' the re-staging of *Il Tempo del Postino* is a testament to the malleability of such work when presented with potential investors.⁴⁹⁶ In this case, the 'delivery' of *Il Tempo del Postino* was not so much random and dictated by the artists, but instead upgraded to tracked, nominated delivery at the request of an audience of art dealers and industry professionals who don't mind paying for extra for postage. Although the 2008 exhibition 'theanyspacewhatever' sought to cement a reputation for 'relational' art as 'relational', it also played host to '24-Hours on the Concept of Time'. Echoing the participation of the 'witnesses' in 'Le Labyrinthe moral', Nancy Spector, curator of 'theanyspacewhatever', invited philosophers, sociologists, art historians, economists and theologians to share their 'aesthetic perspectives on time,' during the all-day event.⁴⁹⁷ Similarly, in 2011 Gonzalez-Foerster, whose practice has been described as 'work[ing] in a permanent relation to others,' debuted the products of her collaborative work with Tristan Bera at the Kunsthalle in Zurich.⁴⁹⁸ The collaboration was based on exploring a shared interest in the writings of the French novelist and playwright Honoré de Balzac resulting in 'an open-ended exhibition lasting a year encompassing several events around the author of *La Comédie humaine*'.⁴⁹⁹ The works mentioned here are by no means exhaustive, but are indicative of the prolonged interest in time(s) that have shaped much of the work associated with *Relational Aesthetics*, and its 'ongoing interactions' and 'open-ended scenarios'.

The Relational 'Event'

If 'relational' art is often based on time(s), what are the concepts that artists are seeking to interrogate, and how might such artwork challenge existing temporal formats? Before attempting to answer this question, it is useful to outline previous efforts to define *Relational Aesthetics* as centred around the notion of the 'event'. Exhibitions and projects such as the re-staging of 'Le Labyrinthe moral' seem at odds with some of the criticisms directed at

⁴⁹⁶ Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 100.

⁴⁹⁷ Nancy Spector, *theanyspacewhatever*, ed. by (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publication, 2008), p. 14.

⁴⁹⁸ Serge Lasvignes, 'Foreword' in *Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster 1887-2058*, ed. by Emma Lavigne, trans. by Charles Penwarden, Sarah-Louise Raillard and David Wharry (London; New York: Prestel Publishing, 2015), p. 9, (p. 9).

⁴⁹⁹ Catherine Millet, 'Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster: "Not necessary to do a definitive work"' in *Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster 1887-2058*, ed. by Emma Lavigne, trans. by Charles Penwarden, Sarah-Louise Raillard and David Wharry (London; New York: Prestel Publishing, 2015), pp. 42-72, (p. 42).

Relational Aesthetics; for example, the cultural geographer Elizabeth Straughan has argued that the capacity for social exchange and conviviality within 'relational' art is limited because it is 'anchored in the relational art event'.⁵⁰⁰ Statements like Straughan's are not uncommon with Martha Buskirk describing also 'relational' art as 'event-driven'.⁵⁰¹ Buskirk continues by explaining that,

much of the work promoted under the relational aesthetics rubric loses a great deal of resonance after the initial celebration is over, due in large part to the uneasy compromise between the single event and the long duration of the exhibition.⁵⁰²

Such a statement implies that there is little to gain from 'relational' art after the event, however, neither Straughan nor Buskirk explain what is meant by the 'event' here. Instead, they imply that 'relational' art operates in short flurries of activity, or operates in a similar way to exhibition previews and gallery openings; visitors look at some art, stay for a quick chat and a glass of wine before heading home, or, in the case of *Relational Aesthetics* perhaps the 'event' is over once the kitchen is out of pad Thai. Whilst there are instances in which 'relational' art has hosted particular stand-alone events, such as Huyghe's bus tour of the industrial centres of Bordeaux during the first week of 'Traffic', there seems to be little other evidence to suggest that such work focuses on the notion of the 'event' as its central premise, with many artworks either stemming from pre-existing projects (e.g. Huyghe and Parreno's *The House or Home?* which emerged out of *L'Association des Temps Libérés*) or acting as a springboard for future projects (e.g. Cattelan and Gonzalez-Foerster's *Permanent Food* which was founded after collaborating together during 'Le Labyrinthe moral').

With this in mind, neither Straughan's nor Buskirk's statements seem to correlate with recent theories of the 'event', such as those explored by the French philosopher Alain Badiou, whose work emerged out the Maoism of the 1960s. The concept of the 'event' as inherent to social change is perhaps Badiou's most well-known and critiqued concept. For Badiou, the 'event' relates to conceptions of revolution and social change. Although usually discussed in relation to politics, Badiou's concept of 'event' can be applied elsewhere in other domains.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰⁰ Elizabeth Straughan, *Geographical Aesthetics: Imagining Space, Staging Encounters* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 133.

⁵⁰¹ Martha Buskirk, *Creative Enterprise: Contemporary Art between Museum and Marketplace* (London; New York: Continuum, 2012), p. 20. In *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, Buskirk also addresses the notion of 'time' as related to the 'event' of the exhibition in relation to the art market. Buskirk argues that 'the issues surrounding the future of a work of art may not be of much concern the first time the work is exhibited, [...] it is only with the establishment of a market for their work that artists are forced to concern themselves with the life of the work over time'. See: Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2005), pp. 24-26.

⁵⁰² Buskirk, p. 282.

⁵⁰³ For example, Badiou has used the concept of the event or evental site in discussions of the 1848 revolution and the Arab Spring. See: Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riot and Uprisings*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London; New York: Verso, 2012), pp. 16-60.

In Badiou's work, the 'event' is rooted in a 'void' of 'inconsistent multiplicity'.⁵⁰⁴ This 'void' is often hidden by the dominant ideology meaning that the 'evental site', an abstract concept in which the multiplicities act as holding pens for potentially disruptive moments, is excluded from the ordering of daily life. But, as Badiou argues, these evental sites, which are constituted of 'inconsistent multiplicities', have a constant presence even if they are *invisible* to society, with them only becoming *visible* as a result of the event. Although the event symbolises the continual persistence of underlying potential for social change, Badiou suggests that the event can be both 'dramatic' and 'random', the results of which can not be foreseen. For example, whilst in certain circumstances, such as 'epochal events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall,' the event should be viewed as 'dramatic, yet in many ways perfectly intelligible (if not predictable) outcomes of developments already in train'.⁵⁰⁵ The continual potential for disruptive moments means that the evental site is positioned '*on the edge of the void*'.⁵⁰⁶ On one hand, the concept of social change being constantly *possible* can be used to acknowledge the multiple temporalities and spaces necessary to enact social change. Yet, Badiou's idea has also been critiqued by figures such as Bensaïd, for the decidedly *dated* nature of its approach. As Bensaïd writes, '[Badiou] strives, against the contemporary current, to save the Maoist event [...] from the petrifying grip of history'.⁵⁰⁷ Comparing Badiou with Althusser, Bensaïd argues that such a view 'ends up rendering democracy unthinkable and impracticable,' thus making the event similar to the sovereign subject, which 'provides its own norm and is represented only by itself'.⁵⁰⁸ In the context of *Relational Aesthetics*, perhaps this renders the art associated with as 'only represented by itself', and incomparable to other art forms. In her analysis of May '68 as an 'event', Kristin Ross describes the protests as 'being an event, in the sense that Alain Badiou has given the term,' as 'something that arrives in excess, beyond all calculation, something that displaces people and places, that proposes an entirely new situation for thought'.⁵⁰⁹ If *Relational Aesthetics* is understood as a series of events, then what is to be made of the prolonged nature of projects? Are exhibitions of so-called 'relational' art really on a par with the protests of May '68? Other than originating in France, there seems little correlation other than Bourriaud's vague allusions towards May '68 – an event which he argues was the product of 'the failure of modernity'.⁵¹⁰ As Ross notes, what characterised May '68 as an 'event' was its reliance on 'real participation – much more

⁵⁰⁴ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. by Oliver Feltham (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 183.

⁵⁰⁵ Badiou, p. 207; Christopher Norris, *Badiou's 'Being and Event': A Reader's Guide* (London; New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 161.

⁵⁰⁶ Badiou, p. 185.

⁵⁰⁷ Daniel Bensaïd, 'Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event', in *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. by Peter Hallward (London; New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 94-105, (p. 100).

⁵⁰⁸ Bensaïd, 'Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event', p. 104.

⁵⁰⁹ Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, p. 26.

⁵¹⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 84.

than a vague, formal solidarity, much more than even share ideas – [that] altered the course of lives'.⁵¹¹ Whilst the effects of May '68 are still being felt, most recently being compared to the *Gilets Jaunes* movement, it seems fair to ask if the effects of *Relational Aesthetics* are still being experienced in a similar way. If thinking about this on a public scale, the answer to this question is probably 'no'. Art, obviously, can play a role in uprisings and, more often than not, is essential to such events. However, in recent histories, it is not the 'relational' artists or works described as such by Bourriaud that have become emblems of these movements.⁵¹² This is not to say that 'relational' art does not have the capacity to alter everyday lived experience, rather, according to Bourriaud, 'relational' points towards 'the future of art'.⁵¹³ But, if, as Badiou argues, the 'event' can take place in domains other than political life, then maybe *Relational Aesthetics* can be considered as 'evental' to an extent. If, for Badiou, the 'event' is premised on 'inconsistent multiplicities', 'relational' art, with its oft-shared interest in questioning temporal formats and operating both in the present and towards an imagined futurity, contains the 'inconsistent multiplicities' necessary for an 'event' of sorts. Although heavily criticised, *Relational Aesthetics* has been described as 'differing from earlier aesthetic models by the way it aims to effect social change,' and that through its 'opening up the gallery space [...] the rules of the game of art are altered'.⁵¹⁴ Whilst not making a 'real change' to everyday lives as in Ross' iteration of the 'event', 'relational' art seems to tick a couple of the boxes required for a Badiouan evental site.

'Relational' art taking place as an 'event' also leads to wider questions surrounding the temporal restrictions, or lack thereof, in the restaging of exhibitions. If *Relational Aesthetics* is based on interpreting exhibitions and artworks as events, rather than artworks being understood as developments and continuations of shared interests, are the re-stagings of exhibitions and artworks to be understood simply as the residue of the 'arty-parties' described by Hal Foster in his critique of 'relational' art?⁵¹⁵ Or, are re-stagings the equivalent of the after-parties of the *Relational Aesthetics* 'arty party', providing further opportunities for social exchange and the continuation of projects? Or, perhaps these re-stagings are just the hangover – hazy memories of overindulgent 'arty-parties' that participants have already forgotten the morning after or wish to forget. Surely, the numerous re-stagings of exhibitions,

⁵¹¹ Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, p. 26.

⁵¹² For example, in the recent *Gilets Jaunes* movement, protesters have sought inspiration for posters originally designed by the Atelier Populaire during the May '68 protests. As one example, protestors in 2019 used the famous screenprint '*la beauté est dans le rue*' ['beauty is in the street'] as the basis for an updated version, where the central figure is wearing a yellow vest amidst the slogan '*la démocratie est dans la rue*' ['democracy is in the street].

⁵¹³ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 78.

⁵¹⁴ Brett David Potter, 'Recycled Images, Relational Aesthetics, and the Sound of Music' in *The Other Journal*, ed. by Andrew Shutes-David, Tom Ryan and Dan Rhodes (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), pp. 69-79, (p. 71).

⁵¹⁵ See: Hal Foster, 'Arty Party', *London Review of Books*, 25:23 (2003), 21-22.

such as 'Le Labyrinthe moral', and subsequent projects that have emerged out of the 'relational' art of the 1990s, coupled with a consistent focus on time(s) in many 'relational' artworks is a testament to the *actual* shared and longstanding interest of particular artists working in the 1990s. However, the restaging of exhibitions also highlights the enduring nature present in displays of so-called 'relational' art. On this note of restaging, it is worth referring to the art historian James Meyer's writing on site specificity and 'functional sites'. Although discussing legacies of land art and works by artists such as Robert Smithson and Richard Serra, the functional sites which Meyer describes are not necessarily rooted to a single space. In fact, they 'may or may not incorporate a physical place'.⁵¹⁶ Instead, the functional site is 'a process, an operation occurring between sites'.⁵¹⁷ Although re-stagings of 'relational' art have taken place in the same locations of previous exhibitions, perceiving these as functional sites enables a further consideration of the multiple temporalities involved in the often-open-ended scenarios proposed for these projects in the first place. As Meyer notes, the functional site 'is a temporary thing, a movement, a chain of meanings and imbricated histories: a place marked and swiftly abandoned'.⁵¹⁸ Yet this 'abandonment' is not total, nor does it mark an end to projects. Instead, the functional site is a place of constant movement and temporalities. This statement is also supported by Kwon, whose writing on site-specific art and locational identity explores similar themes to those of Meyer. In her account, Kwon discusses the multiplicity of spaces and temporal periods associated with site-specific art. Like Meyer, Kwon states that 'site-oriented art' is 'structured (inter)textually rather than spatially'.⁵¹⁹ The same too, then, can be said of examples of 'relational' art like Huyghe's *L'Association des Temps Libérés*. Although founded for 'Le Labyrinthe moral', the association created projects in subsequent years, meaning that like many of the 'relational' open-ended scenarios, that the artwork itself can be (re)considered, (re-)staged and (re)interpreted in multiple spaces and time(s) according to the rationale of curatorial practices. In the context of *Relational Aesthetics*, the exhibition as both 'event' and 'functional site', alongside 'relational' artworks that can usually take place *anywhere* through proposing 'scenarios', shows the centrality of time(s) to creating and *maintaining* such work.

Durational Aesthetics

If 'relational' art is to be interpreted as a product of an interest in time(s), what is its main intention and which aspects of time(s) does *Relational Aesthetics* interrogate? With the

⁵¹⁶ James Meyer, 'The Functional Site; or, The Transformation of Site Specificity' in *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, ed. by Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 23-37, p. 25.

⁵¹⁷ Meyer, p. 25.

⁵¹⁸ Meyer, p. 25.

⁵¹⁹ Kwon, p. 29.

discussion of 'relational' art offering 'open-ended' scenarios it could be suggested that the shared interest is to be found in questioning the concept(s) of duration. Duration as the time in which something continues can be seen in many of the artworks and exhibitions discussed, particularly in those sharing a common objective of continuing, or 'freeing' works from pre-existing temporal formats. If, then, duration is at the forefront of 'relational' art and encourages social exchanges due to its efforts to continue and expand upon traditional exhibition forms, perhaps the art originally associated with *Relational Aesthetics* could be aligned with what the performance studies scholar Edward Scheer has dubbed 'durational aesthetics'.⁵²⁰ Building on the work of Henri Bergson, Scheer suggests that 'durational aesthetics' is akin to Bergson's reading of *real* duration as a 'simple flux, a continuity of flowing, a becoming'.⁵²¹ For Bergson, duration is not confined to the empiricism of chronological succession. As Bergson argues: 'The more we study the nature of time, the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new'.⁵²² For Bergson, time is continually flowing and cannot be quantified, meaning that it is possible for multiple temporalities to exist simultaneously. In response to this, Scheer argues that 'durational' art 'constitutes a disruption to the chronopolitical experience of the everyday life that we live, where our time is so regulated and accounted for'.⁵²³ In essence, Scheer positions 'durational aesthetics' as a response to the influence of capitalism over the organisation of time, with 'durational' art and performances attempting to expose some of the inherent complexities and contradictions that capitalism places on the experience of time. This theme appears throughout literature on artists associated with durational practices; for example, in her study of Marina Abramovic, fellow performance scholar Mary Richards argues that Abramovic's durational performances demonstrate the 'arbitrary nature of the time-based constraints we live by in Western society,' revealing the nature of 'our acculturated existence as members of a capitalist-based economy where 'time equals money'.⁵²⁴ However, if 'durational' art is supposed to act as a disruption and attempt to challenge the regulation of time in daily life, then there are questions to be asked surrounding the alternative time(s), or multiple temporalities that 'durational' art provokes. Instead of proposing alternate temporalities, the content of much 'durational' art is premised on doing things over set periods of times, much like hours of the working day conditioned by clock time. Whilst the actions completed by artists within these situations may not resemble typical work activities, the

⁵²⁰ Edward Scheer, 'Introduction: The End of Spatiality or the Meaning of Duration', *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 17:5 (2012), 1-3, (p. 1).

⁵²¹ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), p. 269.

⁵²² Bergson, p. 11.

⁵²³ Edward Scheer and Mike Parr, 'The Resistances of the Body: On Durational Art and Techning Hseih', *Performance Paradigm*, 10 (2014), 48-66, (p. 49).

⁵²⁴ Mary Richards, *Marina Abramovic* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 97.

adherence to predetermined hours can be compared to working hours. But it can be argued that such 'durational' works pose opposition to capitalist constraints on time as a result of the artist choosing to participate in these activities over others. One point to bear in mind in this debate is the prevalence of set periods, or measurements, of time(s) in art described as 'durational'. For example, Scheer repeatedly refers to the practices of Marina Abramovic (*512 Hours*), Mike Parr (*Daydream Island*) and Teching Hsieh (*Time Clock Piece*) to explain the nature of 'durational aesthetics'. Often used in a literal sense, the titles for 'durational' artworks are based on the particular amount of time dedicated to whatever their piece may entail (e.g. Abramovic's *512 hours* represents the total number of hours she spent performing during her 2014 exhibition at The Serpentine; Barbara Campbell's *1001 Nights Cast* (2005-8) 'took place over the duration of 1,001 nights'.⁵²⁵ To this extent, the majority of artworks studied as 'durational' rely on a predetermined time frames that measure, or record, duration. This measurement is then used to show both the ambitions for the 'durational' projects and as a testament to the artist's ability to *endure* these experiences.⁵²⁶ Here, it is as if 'durational aesthetics' becomes intertwined with narratives of *l'art corporel* [body art], a sort of mutually exclusive byword for the capacity of the performer's own body. The exchanges of 'relational' art which require the presence of at least two parties are not dependent on the individual capacity of the artist to 'complete' a particular task, nor are they usually based around testing the body's limits. The crucial difference between time(s) in 'durational aesthetics' and time(s) in 'relational aesthetics' is the focus on 'open-ended scenarios'. In 'relational' art, the experience of time(s) is not predetermined, and the 'ongoing interactions' are considered possible due to emphasis placed on the open-endedness, or *incompleteness*, of artworks and exhibitions. This is in contrast to 'durational' art because although the term suggests a continuation of artworks, this continuation is only maintained until the physical limits of the performer are reached or the scheduled end of the performance itself.

⁵²⁵ Adrian Heathfield, 'Durational Aesthetics', in *Timing: On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*, ed. by Beatrice von Bismarck, Rike Frank, Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), pp. 135-151, (p. 144).

⁵²⁶ Scheer cites the artist Fiona McGregor's *Water #1: Descent* (2011). For this performance, McGregor proposed a project that would take place over 24 hours in which she 'would lay on a table covered with salt,' whilst 'rainwater equivalent to her bodyweight, collected and suspended in a bladder above would drip onto her forehead'. Although starting the performance with the intention to complete it over the 24 hours, McGregor's plan was cut short after five hours due to the physical strain demanded by the work. As with many examples of 'durational' art, the work itself relies on the artist's ability to *endure* particular scenarios for the amounts of time agreed prior to engaging in the activity. Such performances, therefore, are reliant on the body and its capabilities in a way that transcends the ambition of 'relational' art to encourage social exchanges. See: Scheer, pp. 2-3.

Situating Time in *Relational Aesthetics*

As discussed, it seems inevitable that the presence of time(s) and questions surrounding temporal formats continue to inform art associated with *Relational Aesthetics*. So, what aspect of, or approach to, time(s) is 'relational' art concerned with, and how does this manifest within the work itself? Here, it will be argued that although 'relational' art often has the capacity to encourage social exchanges, this is a by-product of the overarching interest in challenging temporal formats. As the art historian and curator Mary Jane Jacobs has argued, exchanges exist 'like conversations, within temporal experiences shared by a social or communal body'.⁵²⁷ According to this view, social exchanges exist within temporal experiences, implying that the experience(s) of time(s) is not only a prerequisite for facilitating social situations, but something which forms the basis for all forms of social exchange. Upon its initial publication *Relational Aesthetics* claimed to be able to facilitate new forms of exchanges that were exempt from the prevailing ideologies that conditioned and distorted daily interactions. Yet, as discussed in the previous chapter, the claims for 'relational' art as socially and economically autonomous are unsubstantiated insofar as that to exist, such work is usually reliant on the conditions and regulations determined by those in positions of power. If there is an underlying interest in time(s) within 'relational' art, then this is based on challenging the organisation of time from the inside, with this 'inside' perhaps being the inner workings of '*le système*' so elusively described by Bourriaud. This is not to say, however, that *Relational Aesthetics* is a transformatory field in which associated artworks share a mutual appreciation for philosophical conceptions of time(s) or seek to perform rigorous internal critique. Rather, this chapter proposes that 'relational' art shares an interest in temporal formats from a socio-historical position. Time(s) in 'relational' art, despite seeming innate to particular examples, remains somewhat elusive. Although much of the work described as 'relational' has occupied the form of 'open-ended scenarios' that have sought to test and expand on exhibition formats, such qualities do not transform or equate *Relational Aesthetics* into 'durational aesthetics'. Similarly, given the context of 1990s France, where most 'relational' art was conceived and exhibited, the focus on 'ongoing interactions' is not synonymous with the *longue durée* [long term].⁵²⁸

⁵²⁷ Mary Jane Jacob, 'Reciprocal Generosity' in *What We Want is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*, ed. by Ted Purves (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 3-10, (p. 7).

⁵²⁸ *Longue durée* is the French term used by the Annales School to describe their approach to historiography. Whilst the Annales School, a group of historians interested in incorporating social scientific methods to historiographical studies, was concerned with long-term social history, their analytic approach is at odds with the content of many examples of 'relational' art. Although the Annales School and *Relational Aesthetics* share an interest in social history and the socio-historical formulation of time, the former's aversion to Marxist historiography renders it redundant in discussions of 'relational' art. This is because, whilst much 'relational' art is not necessarily concerned with interpreting Marxist theory, much of the work, particularly from the 1990s, cannot be understood if issues relating to social class and economic constraints are ignored. *Relational Aesthetics*, therefore,

Socio-historical Time

In order to understand how socio-historical concepts of time(s) have influenced *Relational Aesthetics*, it is pertinent to return to Huyghe's *L'Association des Temps Libérés* and its objectives of 'developing unproductive time, reflecting on free time and developing a society without work,' through 'staging public meetings, events and celebrations'.⁵²⁹ The public meetings and events of *L'Association* were proposed to take place in various locations across France, usually in venues either hosting or within the vicinity of one of Huyghe's exhibitions. Each meeting resembled a different format, ranging from local council meetings to summer fetes. The invitation to the meetings were open to all, with those in attendance being encouraged to initiate discussions around the importance of time and the factors which influenced the organisation of their lives. The intention here was to encourage participants to reconsider the nature of their own 'free' time, alluding to society's name.⁵³⁰ However, records of these meetings do not exist, so it is difficult to be sure of whether they were ever even conducted. From the outset, Huyghe's society sought to question how audiences perceived their 'free' time, and the extent to which they felt that this time was truly their own. This is because since the advent of capitalism efforts had been made to ensure a clear distinction between time spent at work and time spent away from work ('free' time). As E. P. Thompson argues, in his seminal 'Time Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', 'industrial societies of all varieties have been marked by time-thrift and by a clear demarcation between "work" and "life"'.⁵³¹ Such distinctions have led to debates surrounding 'work-life balance' with many aspiring to achieve a 'healthy balance' between the two. But, as Sarah Sharma has argued in her study of time, work and culture, 'work-life balance is a potentially limited goal,' since it is 'an idea about the time of work and the time of life that sees no alternative temporal order beyond the corporate control of bodies'.⁵³² The point here, and one of the central issues for *L'Association*, was to explore how people spent and their time and to question their reasons for completing, or organising their time in particular ways. At the heart of this was a central concern with challenging the way in which industrialised (capitalist) time influences these decisions, by asking participants to embrace their 'free' time for 'unproductive' activities. But what happened in society for things to reach a point whereby life is demarcated between 'life' and 'work' and the influence of the latter is the greatest determiner of the 'life'?

relies on a socio-historical understanding of time and often references this so as to be able to create artworks which seek to challenge pre-existing temporal formats. See: André Burgière, *The Annales School: An Intellectual History*, trans. by Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁵²⁹ *Journal Official*, unpaginated.

⁵³⁰ Note here that the usage of *libérés* in the title translates as 'freed', a point which will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁵³¹ E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past & Present*, 38 (1967). 56-97, (p. 93).

⁵³² Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 106.

E. P. Thompson's essay is perhaps the most well-known effort to chart the development of time in relation to the development of capitalism. First published in 1967, Thompson's article discusses the differences in how time(s) has been measured and understood throughout history. Focusing on the notion of 'clock time' since the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Thompson maps the increase in the production of timepieces as production and consumption of goods altered with the rise of industrialisation. As production began to change from rural agricultural crofts to urban centres so too did labour. Prior to industrialisation, 'social intercourse and labour intermingled [as] the working day lengthens or contracts according to the task'.⁵³³ However, with the development of capitalism such scenes became a rare sight, with those who had grown used to 'labour timed by the clock, this attitude to labour appears wasteful and lacking in urgency'.⁵³⁴ As new technology increased the possibilities for production, the measurement of time became an indicator of productivity and the capacities for producing goods for profit. With employers' desire for profits growing, clock-time was manipulated so as to fool workers into working longer hours by ringing the lunch bells early, forcing workers to rush back to their stations so as to avoid penalties. These changes also indicated a change in the nature of social relations. Building on the work of E. P. Thompson, Jonathan Martineau has argued that units that measure time such as the calendar have 'always been a tool of regulation of socio-economic life by states, religious elites, or dominant classes'.⁵³⁵ With the advent of capitalism, time became another tool of measuring performance and subordinating the working classes, being used to pit workers against one another as they vied to keep their positions in the industrial centres. From this point on, such tactics radically altered the perception of productivity, altering not only the way in which time is experienced but also the ways in which social relationships are experienced.

Leisure and Unproductive Time

The exploitation of workers and inordinate demands on their times is commonplace across sectors around the world. As France prepared for the largest series of strikes the country had seen since May '68, the objectives of *L'Association* could not have been more topical. As workers prepared for strike action in opposition to the newly elected Republican government's proposal to cut to the salaries of public-sector workers, pensions and public spending, workers were confronted by their own questions relating to time; would salary cuts lead to fewer working hours and more 'free' time; how would this newfound time be spent if there is less money? Workers were also reminded of the battle for *RTT*, a scheme proposed by the

⁵³³ E. P. Thompson, p. 60.

⁵³⁴ E. P. Thompson, p. 60.

⁵³⁵ Jonathan Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation: A Socio-Historical Inquiry into the Making of Modern Time* (Leiden; Boston, MA., Brill, 2015), p. 111.

Socialist Party in the 1980s that promised to reduce the working week from 40 hours to 35 alongside introducing an additional week of paid holiday.⁵³⁶ However, Mitterrand's ambitions for a fairer and more equal France were halted in the mid-1980s as a result of France 'facing a rapid depreciation of the franc and deep deficits, the government changed its general economic policy,' meaning that 'additional working time reductions and the goal of a 35-hour working week were abandoned'.⁵³⁷ As tensions rose in the aftermath of the 1995 election, the objectives of *L'Association* seems to coincide with those of the striking workers, students and activists. By not working, those on strike were no longer adhering to the industrialised conception of time that governed their everyday life and, as the strikes in France continued to gather momentum, the number of workers on strike increased between September and December 1995, leading to over 6 million strike days being recorded with the Ministry of Employment.⁵³⁸

For Huyghe, *L'Association*, rather than advocating the production of profit through the exploitation of workers, sought to offer a space in which a reconsideration of time, and the extent to which it can be *free* within industrial society, is possible. As already mentioned, the free time of Huyghe's society is concerned with de-structuring capitalist formulations of time which result in time being equated with quotas and making money. Perhaps the first thing to note is that Huyghe's 'free time' is not synonymous with leisure. In his efforts to consider developing a society without work, Huyghe distanced himself from set time periods (in opposition to 'durational' projects as discussed earlier in this chapter) and concepts which are dependent on work in order to be conceived. Huyghe's distinction between free time and leisure is not a wholly new concept. Theorists such as Herbert Marcuse have discussed the contentions between the two subjects, stating that it is in 'advanced industrial society, [that] leisure is unfree to the extent to which it is administered by business and politics'.⁵³⁹ Although Marcuse was writing during a time in which capitalist ideology had permeated society and the means of production, the administration of leisure and its dependence on supposedly productive activities such as work has its roots in Aristotelian thought. As the political theorist Nicole Marie Shippen has argued, there cannot be a discussion of leisure without the consideration of work since it is an obligation to working hours which determines the amount of time available for leisure. As Shippen goes on to state, today, our understanding of leisure is 'defined primarily in relation to production (work) and consumption (consumerism)'.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁶ *RTT* is the abbreviation of the French '*La reduction du temps de travail*' [The reduction of working hours].

⁵³⁷ Philippe Askenazy, 'Working time regulation in France from 1996 to 2012', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 37 (2013), 323-347, (p. 324).

⁵³⁸ <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/french-public-sectors-strike-against-juppe-plan-1995>.

⁵³⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 52, fn. 38.

⁵⁴⁰ Nicole Marie Shippen, *Decolonizing Time: Work, Leisure and Freedom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 22.

Shippen traces the idea of leisure back to Aristotle, for whom both labour and leisure, along with play and relaxation, were deemed to be necessary activities for the full development of the contemplative subject. According to Aristotle, leisure is considered as a 'condition' or state of being, one in which 'time has no role'.⁵⁴¹ Even in its classical formation though leisure was not time in which people were able to do as they pleased, as Aristotle wrote: 'If some shame must always attach to any failure to use aright the goods of life, a special measure of shame must attach to a failure to use them aright in times of leisure'.⁵⁴² To a certain extent, then, it could be argued that the conditions which Aristotle imposes on what may constitute an 'appropriate' use of leisure time has more in common with leisure in contemporary society than it may first appear. As Shippen notes, 'the conditions of capitalism have reduced the classical understanding of leisure as a good in itself to an instrumental, disciplined, and commodified understanding of leisure'.⁵⁴³ This is because today the term leisure is not necessarily associated with *free* activities - both in the monetary and ontological understanding of the term. Today, leisure is an industry and one which thrives on offering a supposed escape or release from the constraints of working life. However, leisure-seekers cannot escape the clutches of capitalist society, and their efforts to enjoy leisure activities instead render them as willing consumers, perpetuating the conditions that exploit them in the first place. Activities that may once have been deemed as necessary for personal development now play a dual role in supporting an ever-expanding industry, an industry in which leisure is marketed as a commodity that can be bought and enjoyed. Art, of course, is one such activity that has become subsumed into the leisure industry since the Renaissance, with it now being commonplace for galleries to place an ever-increasing focus on marketing their facilities and collections towards private, or corporate clients, with the hope of increasing their 'brand' as gallery as a destination in which commodities and experiences can be bought and sold. This critique of leisure can be found throughout twentieth century French critical theory, perhaps most obviously in Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life*. Building on Marx's writing on the alienation of labour and the activity of work, Lefebvre critiques the pervasive nature of capitalism on the organisation of peoples' lives, stating that 'leisure and work and 'private life' make up a dialectical system, a global structure'.⁵⁴⁴ This 'global structure' is significant because it provides the basis for everyday life, or umbrella terms under which life and its respective activities can be categorised. In spite of different forms of leisure – here Lefebvre demarcates 'cultural' and 'cultivated' leisure, the 'ultimate characteristic of such

⁵⁴¹ Sebastian De Grazia, *Of Time, Work and Leisure* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1962), p. 11.

⁵⁴² Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 252.

⁵⁴³ Shippen, pp. 21-22.

⁵⁴⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, trans. by John Moore (London; New York: Verso, 2014), p. 62.

cultivated leisure activities is that they lead us back towards the feeling of presence'.⁵⁴⁵ The idea of *being*, or *feeling* 'present' is integral to leisure since it is presented as a way to 'reconnect' with the self after completing activities related to 'work' of 'private life'. But, as Lefebvre argues, 'we work to earn our leisure, and leisure has only one meaning: to get away from work'.⁵⁴⁶ Huyghe's calls for deliberations on 'developing unproductive time' (as in time that is not intended for the creation of profit), thus relates to the issues of the classification of time(s) that exists as external to creating profit within the 'everyday' that Lefebvre describes.

Free(d) Time vs. Liberated Time

One of the issues with Huyghe's projects is that simply stating that *L'Association* was concerned with developing free time is not without its limitations. The founding of *L'Association* has influenced a number of Huyghe's artworks, including the proposal for an artist commune *The House or Home?* (1995), and the sculptural installation *Le Procès du Temps Libre, Part 1: Indices [The Trial of Free Time, Part 1: Clues]* (1999), yet their influence on continuing to support efforts to reconsider freed time can be called into question. For example, although Huyghe makes distinctions between leisure and free time, such meticulousness is not applied to the distinctions that can be made between the *freed* time of his society's name (*Libérés*) and liberated time. As art historian Amelia Barikin has argued, the notion of freed time encourages viewers to question 'to what or for whom is time currently subjugated? And how might that subjugation be maintained or disabled?'.⁵⁴⁷ Huyghe's attempts to disable such a subjugation operate on a micro-level, and whilst his events may have incited support for reconsidering time in day-to-day life amongst those in attendance, such aspirations failed to translate into everyday existence, or offer a radical alternative, unlike the Italian theorist Antonio Negri. Throughout his career, Negri has considered the implications of time(s) and its revolutionary capacity(ies). In France, Negri occupies a curious position in public and intellectual life; a figure simultaneously lauded by figures such as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and considered an intellectual heavyweight for his role in the founding of the journal *Futur Antérieur*, but treated with suspicion on account of his arrest and imprisonment after being accused of "being the brains" of Italian terrorism since 1971'.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁵ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, p.63.

⁵⁴⁶ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, p.62.

⁵⁴⁷ Amelia Barikin, *Parallel Presents: The Art of Pierre Huyghe* (Cambridge, MA.; London: MIT Press, 2012), p. 44.

⁵⁴⁸ *Futur Antérieur* was founded in 1990 by Jean-Marie Vincent, Denis Berger and Negri with the 'objective of promoting a renewal of conceptual research, by creating the conditions for strategic and critical debate'. 43 issues of the journal were published 1990-1998 when the publication was dissolved. In 1999, efforts were made by former editorial staff to renew the publication which led to the founding of the journal *Multitudes* in 2000. See: L'Harmattan, *FUTUR ANTÉRIEUR - Présentation de la revue* (2013) <<https://www.editions-harmattan.fr/index.asp?navig=catalogue&obj=revue&no=16>> [accessed 11 November 2019]. Negri was 'supposedly responsible for a whole range of terrorist acts

Negri was convicted of charges in 1979 in his native Italy. However, it is not Negri's biography that is of relevance to this thesis, rather, it is his discussions of time(s), or the multitudes that can help in understanding the potentiality of 'relational' art being understood as temporal. In *Time for Revolution*, Negri calls for the development of liberated time. Unlike Huyghe's freed time, Negri argues that liberated time is a format with revolutionary potential. As he writes, 'liberated time is not the residue of exploited time, but is rather the force that breaks up and destroys all the links of capitalist society'.⁵⁴⁹ The 'residue' of which Negri speaks of can be considered in relation to Huyghe's proposition for freed time. *L'Association* was founded on the premise of challenging the idea of leisure (in the sense of being used synonymously with the term 'free time'), with 'leisure' being perceived as the time which is 'leftover' after working hours. Instead, for Huyghe's *L'Association*'s, the concept of freed time became the predominant factor in organising time. However, Huyghe's society calls for the development of free time as time for supposed unproductivity (using the term 'unproductive' in this context to describe activity that is not based on producing capital). Although unproductivity is considered to be useful in the sense of permitting individuals to regain some control over their lives, from the outset, Negri argues that liberated time is in itself '*productive*'.⁵⁵⁰ This is because, for Negri, liberated time harnesses the potential to dismantle capitalist society as it is known. Negri's concept of liberated time draws on Adorno's essay on 'free time'. In this essay, Adorno suggests that in spite of its intentions, even free time has succumbed to capitalist ideology, stating that 'the lack of imagination which is cultivated and inculcated by society renders people helpless in their free time,' before going on to explain that rather than standing in opposition to labour, 'free time is nothing more than a shadowy continuation of labour'.⁵⁵¹ In Adorno's thesis, free time is explicitly identified as a product of capitalism and a society based around work, whilst, for Negri, liberated time offers a number of further opportunities that resist capitalist activity to redefine time, extending beyond Huyghe's ambitions for *L'Association*. As well as liberated time being *productive*, it is also deemed as the sphere for collective action, subjectivity and as a machine for actual, radical change, unlike Huyghe's society which only presented a proposal for a forum in which a reimagining of time outside of capitalism could take place. This is not to diminish *L'Association*, as a space-time dedicated to such reconsiderations, but, as Barikin has argued, the main difference here

such as the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro,' whilst a key figure in Autonomia – a leftist Italian movement in the 1970s. Negri vehemently denied all charges and fled to France, spending 13 years (1984-1997) teaching at the Collège international de philosophie, founded by Derrida. See: Mark Neocleous, 'Negri in Prison', *Radical Philosophy* 92 (1998), 54, (p. 54).

⁵⁴⁹ Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. by Matteo Mandarini (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 123.

⁵⁵⁰ Negri, p. 124.

⁵⁵¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. by J. M. Bernstein (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 194.

between Huyghe's freed time and Negri's liberated time is that Huyghe's proposal, unlike Negri's, is not a 'blueprint for revolution'.⁵⁵² Similarly, Negri's call for liberated time is not only dependent on revolution but also acts as a prerequisite for revolutionary activity whilst Huyghe's society is dependent on a certain level of compliance with capitalist governance in order to be recognised as an official organisation.

Making a Case for *contretemps*

Throughout this thesis the idea of 'relational' art as defying, or deflecting, definitions has been emphasised. Much in the same way that the experience of *les relations interhumaines* cannot be quantified, neither can concept(s) of time(s). This might sound like a contradiction; time acts as a measure, time is something interpreted according to individual units that come to be representative of efforts, or 'moments'. But, as Negri notes, although time 'has been conceived of as the quantitative measure of exploitation; now it can be thought of as the qualitative measure of the alternative and of change'.⁵⁵³ Negri's focus on liberated time is part of a wider study of time(s) and, herein, lies its pertinence to a *reconsideration* of *Relational Aesthetics*. It is the focus on multiplicity, of the formation of multiple, different time(s) that is integral to 'revolutionary' activity. As mentioned above, the 'revolutionary' capacity of 'relational' art can be critiqued, as in Barikin's analysis of *L'Association des Temps Libérés*. However, just as 'relational' work is based on multiple forms, if *reconsidering* these 'relational' forms as temporal, then it seems likely that these forms could operate across multiple temporalities. In Negri's text, there are multiple interrogations of time(s), from 'liberated time,' to 'multiple, antagonistic, productive, constitutive, open time'.⁵⁵⁴ Building on his earlier work with Michael Hardt on the 'multitude' as a new model of resistance, Negri refers to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. In their study, Deleuze and Guattari question the linearity of time, arguing instead that time is 'non-linear and irreversible'.⁵⁵⁵ The influence of Deleuze and Guattari's work, like Negri's, is vast but it is this notion of the 'non-linearity' of time that allows for a discussion of multiplicity. For Deleuze and Guattari, the 'multiplicity' exists as a totality in and of itself, not as an adjective to describe a multiplicity of *things*; 'it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, "multiplicity," that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world'.⁵⁵⁶ The multiplicity, therefore, exists as a space-time of sorts in a rhizomatic formation, demonstrating the

⁵⁵² Barikin, p. 47.

⁵⁵³ Negri, *Time for Revolution*, p. 21.

⁵⁵⁴ Negri, *Time for Revolution*, p. 40.

⁵⁵⁵ Eugene W. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's 'A Thousand Plateaus': A Reader's Guide*

⁵⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 8.

interconnectedness of histories and ideas.⁵⁵⁷ Although the multiplicity and the rhizome exist as substantives, they are not singular entities. Rather, the multiplicity and rhizome are the products of, and reliant upon, the linking of points to create a map-like presentation of knowledge. If 'relational' art, in all of its guises as sites, spaces, times, forms and concepts, is thought of as a multiplicity, this allows for the consideration of it as a space-time that exists and contains multiple temporalities. It is not just *les relational interhumaines* that can connect 'relational' art. The 'interhuman relations' that Bourriaud cites as central to 'relational' art are not the only connections that can be made. It can be argued that in order for art to be 'relational' that there needs to be at least two agents – in various forms, but usually referring to peoples or artworks. 'Relational' art, as has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis, is made up of a plethora of elements, and even non-relational 'relational' works, such as *Documents: 24* and *39 Objets de grève*, adhere to this model. Whether the relations, or 'points' to use Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, are linked between audiences, artists, curators, exhibition spaces, materials, forms, and memories, amongst other things, the multiplicity of 'relational' art contains the necessary agents for a multiplicity. Or, as art historian Simon O'Sullivan states in his study of Deleuze, Guattari and contemporary art, '[relational aesthetics] is a turn towards those practices that precisely connect different semiotic regimes with different organisations of power as well as connecting practitioners and producers of art with spectators and beholders'.⁵⁵⁸ Such an approach, however, assumes an equivalence of power relations between all those in the multiplicity. This idea of equivalence, in all senses of the word from access *to* and experience(s) *of* artworks in temporal and spatial contexts, is the predominant point of contention for many critiques of *Relational Aesthetics*. As O'Sullivan continues, it is for this reason that, in spite of a desire to name 'relational aesthetics' as a 'rhizomatic art practice', that 'we might want to demarcate an 'engaged' and creative rhizomatic from those more typical and habitual relations of everyday life'.⁵⁵⁹ It is here, then, that 'relational' art as operating on a multiplicity, operating on multiple temporalities can be considered further. In the case of Huyghe and Parreno's *The House or Home?* there was an intention to question the structuring of day-to-day living, or 'those more 'typical and habitual relations of everyday life'.⁵⁶⁰ To begin with in this project, through its insistence on collaboration and the refusal of any hierarchical relations leaving participants *free* to do as they please, could be seen as conforming to Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the 'creative

⁵⁵⁷ The concept of the 'rhizome', like 'multiplicity' is central to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. The rhizome is described as an 'image of thought', and is considered as a model of thinking of knowledge and history as a 'map' in which 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be'. See: Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 7-25.

⁵⁵⁸ Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 17.

⁵⁵⁹ O'Sullivan, p. 17.

⁵⁶⁰ O'Sullivan, p. 17.

rhizome', for its potential to challenge dominant attitudes towards the use of time(s) and power(s) relations outside of those governed by industrial clock time. According to O'Sullivan, 'hence, a rhizomatic art practice might be best understood as the production and utilisation of alternative or 'counter' networks engaged 'outside' of the dominant'.⁵⁶¹ However, *The House or Home?* as a project that emerged from *L'Association des Temps Libérés* was not 'engaged 'outside' of the dominant'. *L'Association* was officially registered as a non-profit organisation, meaning that in the event that funds were spent acquiring objects or premises (such as a dwelling for *The House or Home?*) that these would be subjected to tax 'perks' – a euphemism for paying less of them. So, even if 'relational' practices are not to be considered as rhizomes, since they exist within the very systems which inhibits their ability to be part of 'counter networks', all is not lost in efforts to consider relational aesthetics as a multiplicity according to Deleuzian and Guattarian thought.

Although the extent of the counter activities of 'relational' art can be questioned, perceiving such practices as 'multiplicity' aids in assessing their innate temporalities. Thus, rather than presenting 'relational' art as a rhizome with the political capacity to oppose dominant structures, 'relational' aesthetics and 'relational' art offering a pause from time can be situated accordingly with the introduction of *contretemps*. Stemming from the Latin *contra* (against) and *tempus* (time), *contretemps* was first used in France during the late 17th century when it was employed to describe a misjudged fencing move. Since then, the usage of the term has remained largely intact. Although no longer solely used to refer to inopportune fencing moves, today *contretemps* carries a similar meaning in both French and English, being used to describe a moment out of time (e.g., if a record playing music skips a beat), or a mishap or hitch at a particular moment in time leading to a delay.⁵⁶² For the purposes here, the etymological root of the term will be used by considering how *contretemps*, as a compound word, maintains its original formulation. Even if linguistic changes such as the multiple definitions of *contretemps* that are in existence are taken into account, the merging of *contre* [against] with *temps* [time] still stands in French. This notion, of being both *against* time(s) and offering a 'pause' of sorts, forms the basis for proposing that 'relational' art is connected via its interest in temporality, rather than *les relations interhumaines*.

Contretemps appears infrequently in French philosophy, or anywhere else for that matter. Today, besides being the title of a journal that published articles as a resource to 'arm the radical left', *contretemps* remains an understudied concept.⁵⁶³ When the term has been

⁵⁶¹ O'Sullivan, pp. 17-18.

⁵⁶² The usage of the term *contretemps* in this context is used more commonly in French, e.g. *Désolé d'être en retard: j'ai eu un contretemps* [Sorry I'm late, I was held up]. In this sense, in English it is perhaps most comparable to a 'hiccup' or 'blip'.

⁵⁶³ *Contretemps* was founded in 2001 after being initiated by Daniel Bensaïd as a space to engage with 'the revival of social movements and the amplification of the audience of the radical left on the

employed, it has been for different reasons. What is interesting to note then, and thinking of this more as a 'point' in line with Deleuze and Guattari's thinking than as a measure of a supposed linearity of history, is that the study of *contretemps*, even if brief can appear in a conceptual map of knowledge in the 1990s. In 1994, for example, the philosopher Jacques Derrida used *contretemps* in his study of friendship. In this text Derrida examined the politics involved in friendship by thinking through issues of the 'democracy' of friendships being premised on reciprocity and non-reciprocity. For Derrida, *contretemps*, as a 'hiccup' or 'pause' can be understood as representative of encounters. Assuming that there at least two parties engaging in dialogue, Derrida argues that there are already 'two moments' within the encounter.⁵⁶⁴ These two moments 'concatenate, they appear together, they are summoned to appear, in the present: they appear themselves as in a single strike, in a single breath, in the same present, in the present itself'.⁵⁶⁵ Here, it seems as if Derrida is referring to the interlinked nature of temporal formats; these 'two moments' become one through the assumed mutuality in the context of 'encounter'. But this is not enough. To propose this formation suggests that there is a collapsing of time(s), space(s) and possible histories through the relationality of dialogue. Such a formation also assumes a democracy, or equality, of relations between the involved parties – the central concern of Derrida's text. However, Derrida recognises this problem, continuing to discuss the multiple temporalities that *contretemps* can embody, simultaneously representing 'moments' and a sense of 'intemporality and untimeliness' through its capacity to work against time(s), thus showing how the 'untimeliness' of *contretemps* interrupts the timeless trajectories of histories.⁵⁶⁶ In Derrida's work friendship, not temporality is the principal focus so *contretemps* is contextualised according to its distinctive relationship to the politics of friendship. This vague allusion to *contretemps* is indicative of a wider interest in the political potential of time(s), and of reconsiderations of time(s) as more than measurement for simply thinking through history.⁵⁶⁷

Similarly, another key figure here is Daniel Bensaïd whose 1995 publication, *Marx l'intempestif* [untimely Marx] offers insights into temporality via a study of dialectical

late 1990s'. See: *Contretemps: revue de critique communiste* (2020) <<https://www.contretemps.eu/projet/>> [accessed 7 July 2020].

⁵⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (London; New York: Verso, 1994), p. 1.

⁵⁶⁵ Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, p. 1.

⁵⁶⁶ Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, p. 14.

⁵⁶⁷ Other critics questioned similar concepts, too; for example, Éric Alliez's book *Capital Times* considers time(s) as having a duality of temporalities as well as the potential to be a space, whilst Françoise Proust's *L'Histoire à contretemps* [*History of contretemps*] attempts to trace the disruptions of time in Walter Benjamin's conception of history. See: Éric Alliez, *Capital Times*, trans. by Georges Van den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), and Françoise Proust, *L'Histoire à contretemps: Le Temps historique chez Walter Benjamin* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1994).

materialism as a tool of resistance.⁵⁶⁸ Using Marx as a basis, Bensaïd examines the nature of how time(s) are experienced under capitalism. The first thing to note is the difference in connotations of the title of Bensaïd's text once translated into English. In 2002, *Marx l'intempestif* was translated as *Marx for Our Times*. Here, though, the linguistic nuances of the terms are, in a sense, lost in translation. In French, *intempestif* can be translated as 'untimely', the same 'untimeliness' that appears in Derrida's account of *contretemps*.⁵⁶⁹ For something to be 'untimely', there is an assumption that the act or experience appears at odds with expectations of how time(s) operates. This, therefore, shows similarities between the 'untimely' and the disruptions enacted through *contretemps* which Bensaïd discusses as an analogy to the mass strike action that took place in France in 1995. On this subject, Bensaïd states: 'History is composed of eventful singularities. An event can be adjudged premature by reference to an imaginary deadline, but not in the tremulous horizon of real possibilities.'⁵⁷⁰ As discussed earlier in this project, these strikes were unprecedented and altered the experiences of time(s) for the whole country for much of the year. Strike action, in its widest understanding, is *untimely*; it presents situations in which the experience of the everyday is interrupted, with extended strike action leading to disjuncture. Like Negri, Bensaïd questions the measurement of time. As he notes:

A time is said to be long or short, hence measurable. But the present possesses no duration. We think we are measuring time; but we are simply measuring intervals. So how are we to measure this perpetual fading in which eternity unravels? The present is incapable of measuring either the past or the future.⁵⁷¹

Here, Bensaïd's work refers back Marx, and in particular his questioning of the organisation of time under capitalism according to *Capital*. Bensaïd's analysis is rooted in class and power relations, with him discussing the multiple temporal modes that operate in society. In this case, 'bourgeois and proletarian revolution' are premised on, and initiate, different temporalities – 'bourgeois revolution sanctions changes that have already occurred,' whereas 'proletarian

⁵⁶⁸ Bensaïd's text was translated into English in 2002 under the title: *Marx For Our Times*. See: Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx For Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of Critique*, trans. by Gregory Elliot (London; New York: Verso, 2002).

⁵⁶⁹ In French, the book's title presents a reading of how Marx's work can be used in social movements as a way of disrupting everyday life through considering multiple temporalities, with these temporalities being simultaneous and dependent upon experiences. However, in English, these nuances are lost. By discussing *Marx For Our Times*, the focus here on the relevance of Marx's text to contemporary society. Even though this is a testament to the book's initial intentions, the temporal disjuncture between the original publication and its translation, like with that of *Relational Aesthetics*, is jarring. Marx's work is undoubtedly useful for 'our times', but the context in which the text initially emerged is, arguably, seen to occupy a *past* moment through its subsequent translation and publication.

⁵⁷⁰ Bensaïd, *Marx For Our Times*, p. 77.

⁵⁷¹ Bensaïd, *Marx For Our Times*, p. 77.

initiates a period of uncertainty and chaos'.⁵⁷² Here, in discussing the distinctions made between different temporal spaces deemed necessary to life, Marx argues that there are two limits to the working day; the first being the 'physical limits to labour-power' which result in the worker having to rest in order to satisfy their 'physical needs;' the second limit being 'moral obstacles,' meaning that the worker needs time in which to satisfy their 'intellectual and social requirements'.⁵⁷³ Given that the need and extent for such activities are unique to the individual worker, Marx explains how the nature of working hours developed a level of elasticity during the growth of capitalist modes of production and consumption. However, this level of elasticity was not a product of the individuality of each worker, rather such elasticity was determined by the capitalist and arranged in order to satisfy their desire for greater production and, ultimately, greater profits. In his example, Marx supposes that the worker may need to expend their labour-power for six hours a day in order to sustain their existence and meet both their physical and moral needs. Yet, under capitalism, the worker forced to work beyond these hours, thus resulting in the capitalist gaining from however many hours' worth of the workers' surplus labour. As David Harvey explains, this creates surplus-value as workers 'labour beyond the number of hours its takes to reproduce the value equivalent of their labour-power,' which, in turn, permits 'the production of a surplus product as a means for the capitalist to gain surplus-value'.⁵⁷⁴ This feeds into the measurement of time, then, because value comes to be equated with, and thus shapes, the 'value' of lived experience. It is the idea of life being led in intervals that mark distinctions between time(s) based on the 'values' that they bring. As Bensaïd notes, 'now, we measure stretches of time, homogenous and yet different, according to whether they bring pleasure or suffering, expectation or oblivion'.⁵⁷⁵ Similar remarks can be found in Nancy's work, too. In their essay '*Espace contre temps*,' Nancy presents a reading of time that challenges the 'rush or frenzy to keep up with the chronological flow of time'.⁵⁷⁶ For Nancy, the presence of chronological, clock time creates the need for a *contretemps*, used here to describe a spatial concept that exists 'extemporaneously', or 'outside of time'.⁵⁷⁷

So, how can this be applied into a reading of *Relational Aesthetics*? The nature of 'relational' work is open, taking on multiple forms and operating on various levels of spatial and temporal politics. Yet the nature of many 'relational' projects is rooted in offering *spaces* for reflection, or 'possible encounters'. If, as Bensaïd notes, 'time is a measure of social

⁵⁷² Bensaïd, *Marx For Our Times*, p. 30.

⁵⁷³ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, Vol. 35-37: Capital* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1996-1998), p. 341.

⁵⁷⁴ David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London; New York: Verso, 2010), p. 136; p. 139.

⁵⁷⁵ Bensaïd, *Marx For Our Times*, p. 77. For further discussion of temporality and time(s) in Marx see: Stavros Tombazos, *Time in Marx: The Categories of Time in Marx's Capital* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), and Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

⁵⁷⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le poids d'une pensée, l'approche* (Paris: La Phocide, 2008), p. 87.

⁵⁷⁷ Nancy, *Le poids d'une pensée, l'approche* p. 87.

relations', the possibility of interrupting this through *contretemps* allows for a potential reconsideration of both temporal formats – through the practical 'pause' 'relational' art can offer and the subject matter of such works like *L'Association des Temps Libérés* – and of interhuman relations – through the necessity of interaction and social relations for lived experience.⁵⁷⁸ When Bensaïd writes of the organisation of time being dependent on its *value*, he argues that this results in 'clashes of temporalities'.⁵⁷⁹ Within this statement, though, there is a clear acknowledgement of the multiple temporalities that exist. In a similar vein to Deleuze and Guattari, Bensaïd focuses on the co-existence of temporalities and the connections which exist between them, which are necessary for a 'clash' to happen in the first place. The connotations of the term 'clash' [*traduit un conflit*] implies that there are contestations between different temporal formats.⁵⁸⁰ The idea of 'transformation' is put forth as being possible through the 'suspension' of such times is where *contretemps* comes in, assigning a name to a pause of sorts that, even if only momentarily, disrupts the measurement of time in response to these clashes. These clashes, then, can be said to create the 'possible spaces of encounter' that Bourriaud describes in *Relational Aesthetics* as providing 'an opening to an unlimited discussion'.⁵⁸¹ These discussions, however, are not limited to verbal acts. Instead, it can be said that the interactions that take place as a result of *contretemps* offer spaces for encounter that can reconsider both the multiplicity and multiple temporalities which coexist and shape everyday activity. *Relational Aesthetics* has been critiqued for its assumption that the interactions that take place *in*, or as a result of, 'relational' art are wholly positive. But, there is no prerequisite for the positivity of experience(s). In the same way that *les relations interhumaines* exist as multiplicity, so too do the temporalities in which they take place and neither of these forms need to be harmonious. Rather, the disjuncture of temporal experience can be *enough* as a momentary pause. *Contretemps*, if it exists as a rupture, does not have to be measured quantitatively or qualitatively. Similarly, although Negri and Bensaïd speak of the 'transformatory' potential of time(s), as does Badiou in the context of the 'event', 'relational' art does not have to possess 'transformatory' capacity. The idea of 'transformation' being presented as a possibility through the 'suspension' of such time is where *contretemps* comes in naming this pause that disrupts the measurement of time according to laws of use, or exchange value. Such is to say, then, that it is *enough* for 'relational' art, with a shared interest in temporality and interhuman relations, to create the conditions for *contretemps*. To assume that such art has the potential for 'revolutionary' or 'transformatory' experience places too much onus on the parties involved. 'Relational' art such as *L'Association des Temps Libérés*,

⁵⁷⁸ Bensaïd, *Marx For Our Times*, p. 77.

⁵⁷⁹ Bensaïd, *Marx For Our Times*, p. 75.

⁵⁸⁰ See: Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx l'intempestif: Grandeurs et misères d'une aventure critique (XIXe-XXe siècles)* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 1995), p. 64.

⁵⁸¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 15.

through its inherent focus on questioning or disrupting time through the creation of spaces to engage with these topics, acts as *contretemps*. For Bensaïd, 'time is fractured, folds back in on itself and swells abruptly'.⁵⁸² Perhaps the same can be said, too, of 'relational' art; 'relational' art is 'fractured' for the disjuncture between its supposed 'relationality' and the 'temporalities' at the centre of many 'relational' practices; 'relational' art 'folds back on itself' through the inherent contradictions and critiques to which it is subjected imposing an idea such work having 'transformatory' capacities; and, 'relational' art 'swells abruptly' through its proliferation across contemporary art, only to be left in waning ebbs as the tastes that dictate the art *à la mode* moves on, leaving *Relational Aesthetics* as *au fait*. However, 'relational' art, like temporalities, are multiplicitous, existing in multiple forms across multiple spaces. Using *contretemps* provides a term to describe these inherent complexities and multiplicitous possibilities for encounter across spaces, both relationally and temporally. As Negri notes, 'we like Deleuze and Guattari because they immerse temporality in the autonomy of a thousand plateaus of creativity'.⁵⁸³ *Contretemps*, then, exists as a point in multiplicity; the relationality of 'relational' art remains overlooked without a consideration of the time(s) in which it is experienced, questioned and considered, with these factors influencing the points, or 'possible spaces of encounter' in which this disruption can take place. The interconnectedness of relations, art, time(s), *Relational Aesthetics*, temporalities and multiplicity are central to many examples of 'relational' art. Rather than seeing 'relational' art as distinct, it is more *productive* to consider it in relation *to*, and as a product *of*, the temporalities on which it is premised, and the *contretemps* that it can facilitate and ponder further.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, a short extract from *Le Petit Prince* was quoted. Upon meeting a merchant, the little prince was faced with questions of how concept(s) of time(s) can be interpreted. In this short dialogue, the little prince was faced with issues such as the commodification of time, 'leisure' and 'free' time. These three examples are just some of the temporal formats that have been discussed in this chapter in an effort to demonstrate the inherent interests, or uses of time(s) in 'relational' art and *Relational Aesthetics*. But, of course, the temporal formats discussed are by no means exhaustive; perhaps, there isn't the *time*, nor the *space* for discussions of what, quite frankly, are *enduring* concepts, concepts that linger and *endure* far beyond those that can exist within the confines of a thesis. However, the time(s) that were discussed were done so with reason. Here, the objective was to show that art described as 'relational' had inherent, and often overlooked, interest(s) in time(s). Rather than

⁵⁸² Bensaïd, *Marx For Our Times*, p. 30.

⁵⁸³ Negri, *Time for Revolution*, p. 127.

'relational' art being premised on *les relations interhumaines*, it was argued that much of the work associated with *Relational Aesthetics* was based on questioning time(s). Art such as Huyghe's *L'Association des Temps Libérés*, which is still, technically, in operation today, demonstrates the open-ended nature that was central to much 'relational' art, and propositions which arose from it, including *The House or Home?* This interest in time is *enduring*, having been present in exhibitions in France throughout the 1990s, such as 'No Man's Time' and 'Le Labyrinthe moral' and later in 'Traffic'. This interest, too, stemmed throughout Bourriaud's curatorial practice, albeit covertly until the 2005 Lyon biennale. In the case of the restaging of exhibitions, and the *spaces* that displays of 'relational' art exist *in* and *through*, the idea of the 'event' was considered, to try and navigate the vaguely 'political' underpinnings of Bourriaud's text with wider theoretical takes on the subject from Badiou and Ross. It seems, then, that the *evidence* for the appearance of time(s) in *Relational Aesthetics* is there; there are some 'relational' artworks made by 'relational' artists that use time(s) as a basis; there were, and continue to be, exhibitions focusing on the topics discussed. However, as examined in earlier chapters, there needs to be scepticism towards tracing these connections so neatly. These connections, whilst evident, cannot act as evidence of a linear trajectory of sorts; a trajectory that begins with 'No Man's Time' (1991), builds momentum in 'Le Labyrinthe moral' (1995), takes a backseat in 'Traffic' (1996), before reaching its peak in 'Expérience de la durée' (2005), and rearing its head for a last hurrah in the second iteration of 'Le Labyrinthe moral' (2014). To do so would be at odds with the contents of this chapter which concluded with an analysis of the multiplicity of temporalities present in so-called 'relational' art. Some of the formats discussed, including 'unproductive' time, 'leisure' and 'free(d)' time, and their presence in *Relational Aesthetics*, are limited. It does not seem unfair to suggest that, when compared to accounts by Bensaïd, for example, that *L'Association des Temps Libérés* is rather 'light-touch' in its approach to questioning temporal formats. Huyghe's free time, therefore, may not yet, or ever, be *free*, and this concept of free(d) time, is not equivalent to a liberation of time from capitalist constraints. But the propositions for such projects, which simultaneously invite debate and encourage interhuman relationships, whilst asking participants – in whatever their capacity – to *reconsider* relationships to concept(s) of time(s) are inherently linked to the context, or moment(s), in which they were created. These questions are indicative of a period which saw people across France questioning the *value* of their time to themselves and their employers, which culminated in mass strike action across the country. This wider political upheaval, or 'event', like the multiple exhibitions and the plethora of 'relational' artworks, was a product of multiple temporalities which resulted in efforts to oppose time(s) as understood and experienced in contemporary society. For all of its contradictions, *Relational Aesthetics*, and examples of 'relational' art such as Huyghe's or his collaborations with Parreno, are indicative of efforts to challenge, or at the very least, *question* the organisation of daily life.

Perhaps, then, these works are best understood as *contretemps*, short breaks, or interstices of sorts, that are *against time* as experienced under capitalism. Even if only momentarily, bringing the theme of time(s) to the forefront of debates around *Relational Aesthetics* not only allows for a *reconsideration* of 'relational' art, but also of its 'relationality'. If offering a pause, or potential for the 'possible encounters' is so key to Bourriaud's text, it seems that concept(s) of time(s) are integral to many of the artworks of the 1990s described as 'relational' at the time, or with hindsight.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 23.

Conclusion

In order to end this thesis, it seems pertinent to return to its beginning, to the moment where ballet dancers and musicians were performing for the public outside the Palais Garnier in central Paris in late 2019. That afternoon, in the middle of winter, passers-by watched as dancers performed pieces from Swan Lake in a public sphere. The Ballet de l'Opéra national de Paris [the Paris Opera Ballet], is an institution steeped in history. Founded in 1669, the Ballet de l'Opéra national de Paris is the oldest national ballet company in the world, with its dancers and performances being held in the highest esteem by cultural bodies across the globe. As the dancers performed in the square outside of the Palais Garnier there were flashbacks to protests of 1968 and 1995. In 1968, following the occupation of the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe [Odean Theatre], one of France's six national theatres, four hundred members of the French National Police surrounded the Palais Garnier in an attempt to 'prevent a similar fate from befalling the high temple of bourgeois music culture'.⁵⁸⁵ Opera staff, including dancers, were striking in support of wage increases and more democratic working conditions as part of the wider calls of the general strike of May '68. After learning that their proposal for these measures had been rejected, 'staff barred the doors of the Palais Garnier and unfurled banners from the second story announcing their strike'.⁵⁸⁶ In 1968, occupations of these cultural institutions were integral to strike action and enacting change. In 1995, during the general strikes that took place across France throughout the year, workers at the Palais Garnier were on strike again. Although the theatre was closed for renovations, tensions between management and employee support for general strike action culminated in a conflict that led to 1995 being described as the year 'of a long, expensive strike'.⁵⁸⁷ On this occasion, staff were unable to occupy the building so joined fellow protesters in the streets. In 2019, during the latest wave of general strikes to hit France, the ballet dancers and opera staff took their performances to the streets. If the cultural institutions that threatened to reduce their employees' pay and future pension prospects whilst continuing to benefit from their labour would not meet their demands, there was nothing to stop them from performing in the square outside of the Palais Garnier. As onlookers and news reporters watched, the barriers which prevent the viewing of such art forms, whether they be social, cultural or economic, were momentarily lifted for the duration of the performance. The reach of the performance, by virtue of its existence in an age where videos and news stories quickly gain traction through their ability to 'go viral', was huge. Media outlets across the world shared reports with headlines such as, 'Now even ballet dancers are downing tools over Macron', and 'In Paris, Even the

⁵⁸⁵ Drott, p. 50.

⁵⁸⁶ Drott, p. 50.

⁵⁸⁷ Agid and Tarondeau, p. 213.

Ballet Dancers are on Strike Over Pensions'.⁵⁸⁸ The point here, though, and ignoring the journalists' cries that *even* artists were on strike which *must* be an indicator of the severity of the outcry over proposed pension reforms, is that there was a collective performance that through its involvement of others was premised on, and promoted, dialogue and interaction. The performance itself engaged with the immediate public who happened to be in the ninth arrondissement that afternoon, as well as with a wider audience who watched, read about and shared videos of the event online. To this extent, it begs the question, was this performance 'relational'? A short answer to this question might be 'no'; the performance did not include any of the artists involved in 'Traffic', Bourriaud's curatorial touch was absent and the performers did not seem to be making efforts to reimagine the future by 'modelling possible universes', and, if they were, they kept such grandiose ambitions hush-hush and out of sight of the prying eyes of the media's cameras.⁵⁸⁹ The ballet performance, therefore, might be best understood as a political act in the sense of it being presented as the result of, and in response to, ongoing industrial action across sectors, in France. The ballet dancers, dressed in their costumes in the middle of winter, became a symbol of the *Gilets Jaunes* movement and the public frustrations that had led to the latest wave of national strikes which, at the time of public performance of *Swan Lake*, were in their sixth consecutive week. To make such a conclusion, in haste, is not to state that political acts have to be part of wider movements, nor do the collective efforts required to perform *Swan Lake* diminish the ways in which the individual can contribute or act *politically*. But, in the simplest of terms and following this line of enquiry, the answer as to whether this particular performance was relational might be 'no'.

However, in *Relational Aesthetics*, and taking his cue from Debord's ideas of the 'spectacle', Bourriaud argues that 'art is a state of encounter'.⁵⁹⁰ He states that in the 'relational' art of the 1990s, the questioning of the forms that art could take led to artists seeking 'to invent possible encounters,' since 'contemporary art is definitely developing a political project'.⁵⁹¹ Bourriaud takes this claim one step further, too, when arguing that '[relational art] arises from an observation of the present and from a line of thinking about the fate of artistic activity'.⁵⁹² In *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud argues that, whilst there is a 'political' aspect to 'contemporary art', with both terms being used in the loosest sense, that such work is created from observing the present. Herein lies the argument that is central to this thesis, that 'relational' art, under all of its various guises, has an intrinsic kinship to the context in which it was conceived. As has been argued, the context of the artworks themselves are not necessarily immediately obvious or at the core of some of the examples discussed,

⁵⁸⁸ Malik, [accessed 29 June 2020]; Mainwaring, [accessed 12 February 2020].

⁵⁸⁹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 13.

⁵⁹⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 18.

⁵⁹¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 23; 17.

⁵⁹² Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 43.

but, nor do they have to be. To demand that each artwork must respond directly to current affairs in order to exercise its 'politics' or relevance is to miss the point. The premise of 'relational' art as forming interhuman relationships through an artwork providing the means for such social interactions to be facilitated and performed is deeply flawed. Critics such as Bishop and Martin have rightly highlighted the issues of assuming that audiences are already a community and that, in Bourriaud's work, the notion of 'community' is superfluously lauded by assuming that 'community' has only overwhelmingly positive connotations.⁵⁹³ But if 'relational' art is to be viewed in more sceptical terms as inventing 'possible encounters', this offers the prospects of possible encounters potentially leading to the forming of possible communities. What is important to bear in mind, though, is that these encounters are not to be viewed in a vacuum. Nor should these encounters be indicative of the 'micro-utopias' that Bourriaud describes; 'micro-utopias', that, again, rely on positive connotations of community and radical politics but without Bourriaud substantiating these claims or providing further details that show an awareness of the inherent complexities at play in using such terminology – even in the 'glossary' of sorts provided at the end of *Relational Aesthetics*. With this being said, it may be useful to view 'relational' art as offering 'possible encounters' so as to understand that such art offers the potential to facilitate interhuman relationships, but only if the audience is willing to engage with this in order for the participation to be democratic. In this sense, it is worth rethinking the question of whether the performance by striking ballet dancers can be considered as 'relational'. To begin with, the performance was a product of a response to ongoing discussions about pension reforms in France, so it is a direct product of its social context and events that had been ongoing and part of the public conscious for several weeks. A deliberate decision was made, too, to enact this performance outside of its customary setting, taking what would usually be seen by a privileged few to the masses. By performing in a public space in a way that was only possible through the ballet staff's responses to proposed political reforms, the performance that afternoon provided the opportunity to create 'possible encounters'. The openness of the term 'encounters' leaves the nature of these free to interpretation; there could be encounters between the dancers and the public watching, encounters between members of the audience, encounters between the media crews and online community platforms, encounters between witnesses of the performance recounting their experiences to others. The limits of these 'possible encounters' are endless but nonetheless imply the potential for social and interhuman interactions. In this sense, then, was this performance 'relational'? A short answer might be 'oui'.

⁵⁹³ See Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 11-14; Martin, 'Critique of Relational Aesthetics', p. 371.

Reflections on a Thesis

This thesis began with an intention to question the very root of ‘relational aesthetics’, something reflected in the decision to refer to the term in inverted commas throughout. This project was born out of a feeling of scepticism towards the art that Bourriaud described as ‘relational’ for the first time in the mid-1990s, a scepticism that has hopefully been maintained and justified throughout this thesis. From the outset, the idea of ‘relational’ art as ‘a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space,’ seemed too vast a thread to be weaved between the artists for the sake of finding commonalities before being ascribed such a label.⁵⁹⁴ Such a view had been echoed by Anglophone critics, yet the criticisms found in Bourriaud’s work by authors across *la manche* were based on finding holes in the ‘theoretical point of departure’ of the ‘human relations’ on which ‘relational’ art was initially premised. These critiques were well-founded and highlighted the complexities at play in Bourriaud’s claims. Yet the critiques, whilst thorough in the attention paid to the theoretical gaps – or the interstices that have been discussed in this thesis – did little in the way of elucidating the ‘practical point of departure’ of the ‘human relations and their social context’ that ‘relational’ art supposedly uses as its basis.⁵⁹⁵ For its point of departure, this thesis focused on the latter part of Bourriaud’s statement, and paid particular attention to the social context in which so-called ‘relational’ art emerged. Such a stance had been ignored by critics, albeit a few texts that have highlighted the issues of public and private spaces which the ‘relational’ art that Bourriaud describes occupies. The call for developing interhuman relations in spaces that are often inaccessible to vast swathes of the population have been rightly criticised, with critics refuting Bourriaud’s claim that ‘what strikes us in the work of this generation of artists is, first and foremost, the *democratic* concern that informs it’.⁵⁹⁶ Although this thesis touched upon some of the issues of social space and democracy – such as the various ways in which strike objects have been interpreted and displayed in the case of Jean-Luc Moulène’s *24 and 39 Objets de grève* – again, this was not the main intention of this research. Instead, this project focused on the socio-historic context in which *Relational Aesthetics* emerged in an effort to trace potential histories in French thought and society that would allow for ‘relational’ art to be interpreted as a product of the specific moment in which it was created. In a sense, this project had to situate the focus on social context within the context of this thesis.

⁵⁹⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 113.

⁵⁹⁵ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 113.

⁵⁹⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 57; See also: Bishop, *Artificial Hells*; Kester, *The One and The Many*; Miller, ‘Activism vs. Antagonism’.

To begin with, it was necessary to outline the premise of 'relational' art according to Bourriaud's writing and to understand how this text was received in its immediate Francophone context. To this end, the results were sparse since in France, *Esthétique relationnelle* was, by Bourriaud's own admission, largely 'ignored'.⁵⁹⁷ Even today, in the wake of the attention paid to the text by scholars 'dans le monde anglo-saxon', mentions of *l'art relationnel* and *esthétique relationnelle* are few and far between, save for a few select reviews and critiques, and analyses of the text in relation to practices of relational ethics.⁵⁹⁸ What is most interesting, perhaps, is that 'relational art' as it is known today emerged not from *Esthétique relationnelle* but out of *Relational Aesthetics* and the subsequent critiques to which it was subjected in Anglophone spheres. For art to be considered under the rubric of *Relational Aesthetics* it seemed that it had to be 'relational', not '*relationnel*'. The critiques of 'relational' art, as has already been mentioned, are justified for their assessments of how notions of 'community', 'exchange' or 'democracy', respectively, might feature and manifest themselves in *Relational Aesthetics*. As with any study, it seems fair to say that it is a case of different strokes for different folks working from a multitude of perspectives and backgrounds. However, through focusing on the socio-historical context of 'relational' art, it seemed as if efforts to posit and interpret *Relational Aesthetics* as a theory had overtaken analysis of the artworks themselves. In some instances, it was as if stressing the theoretical inaccuracies of *Relational Aesthetics* superseded the need to examine the artworks from which the text was born. Art criticism with art at its focus appeared to evolve into chastising theorisations that were never really there in the first place, which seems ironic given that similar criticisms were targeted at exhibitions of what would, retrospectively, be described as 'relational' art.⁵⁹⁹ Given the scepticism, and in some cases derision, directed towards 'relational' art, it is curious that the same level of scepticism was not afforded to the one instance at the end of the book where Bourriaud described 'relational aesthetics' as an 'aesthetic theory'.⁶⁰⁰ In efforts to critique the democracy or inferred idealism of *Relational Aesthetics*, it seems as if certain critics were unwilling to treat the source material in a democratic way, or to overlook the text's nuances in favour of cramming selected quotes into their work to prove an argument without further interrogation. This thesis, too, is guilty of the latter point as with the majority of research

⁵⁹⁷ Bourriaud in Morton [accessed 29 June 2020].

⁵⁹⁸ See: Éric Alliez, 'Post-scriptum sur l'esthétique relationnelle: capitalisme, schizophrénie et consensus', *Multitudes*, 3:34 (2008), 121-125. This text was subsequently translated into English as: 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia and Consensus: On Relational Aesthetics', *Verksted*, 9 (2008), 47-60. See also: Yann Ricordel, '<<Esthétique Relationnelle>>' (2001) de Nicolas Bourriaud: une relecture critique', *Inferno*, 17 June 2015 <<https://inferno-magazine.com/2015/06/17/esthetique-relationnelle-2001-de-nicolas-bourriaud-une-relecture-critique/>> [accessed 29 June 2020]; and, Olivier Fournout, *Théorie de la communication et éthique relationnelle* (Cachan: Lavoisier, 2012), pp. 17-19; pp. 251-254.

⁵⁹⁹ See: Verzotti, pp. 148-149.

⁶⁰⁰ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 112.

performed. In critiquing the critiques this project is not immune to, or above reproach. There was, and still is, no intention to take down the critics of *Relational Aesthetics* for all their worth so as to offer the text a saving grace in light of its opponents. As has, hopefully, been made apparent, this thesis is sceptical of *Relational Aesthetics* and critical of it but with a degree of fairness that tries to situate a text that was largely ignored in its mother tongue within the context of what might be referred to as an 'Anglophone bandwagon'. Perhaps this is a luxury that is afforded with time. The majority of the critiques of *Relational Aesthetics* were written within five years of the text being translated into English at a time when the artists associated with 'Traffic' were dominating contemporary art scenes with solo exhibitions, appearances at biennales and premature retrospectives such as the 2008 Guggenheim show 'theanyspacewhatever'. Writing about *Relational Aesthetics* twenty years after it was published allows a degree of distance that initial critics were not afforded. Perhaps, too, this is a case of rooting for the underdog, even if the underdog in this case is a theoretically weak text written by an international curator whose fortunes do not seem to have been hampered by his earlier imprecisions. Needless to say, without these critiques this project would not exist.

Focusing on how 'relational' art might be perceived in its French context is a direct response to the pre-existing literature that was predominantly uninterested in the wider context of how interhuman relationships might form the basis for artistic projects at this specific moment. In order to do this, this project explored the social, cultural and economic context of contemporary France, an environment in which interhuman relationships were necessary to contend with the backdrop of political turmoil. At every turn efforts to dismantle the hard fought for rights of workers necessitated the existence of forums that promoted and engaged in collective dialogues and effective interhuman relationships that had the capacity to fight for, and enforce, change. Although 'relational' art is often studied in a vacuum or accused of being removed from the very publics with which critics argue it hopes to engage, the idea that particular projects were autonomous and divorced from reality is a stretch too far. This is particularly prevalent when some of the concerns inherent to 'Red December', for example, are also present in artworks such as Pierre Huyghe's and Philippe Parreno's, artworks that at their very core, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are concerned with issues of labour and the usage of time as an evaluator of productivity in a capitalist society. Given the campaigns by workers, who were rightly outraged by propositions for their retirement age to be raised and working hours increased, that were brewing when some of these examples of 'relational' art were being created, it seems short sighted to view such work as autonomous or removed from the society and context of which it is a product. It is unrealistic to assume that artworks such as Jean-Luc Moulène's, whilst admittedly not 'relational' in the sense of being written about in *Relational Aesthetics*, could exist if it were not for the interhuman relations between striking communities that would later develop into further relations being

formed between objects indicative of workers' struggle, newspaper readers, union members and gallery visitors. Could Matthieu Laurette's art that is premised on questioning exchange have been created if not for *détournement*? And, finally, is 'relational' art as a medium to be understood as offering mediations on how time is spent, or passes?⁶⁰¹ If so, can 'relational' art as a medium that is focused on time be understood outside of a theoretical context that promotes the study of the experience of time, whether that be through momentary 'possible encounters' or durational epics? In analysing such work as 'theoretically autonomous', issues surrounding a potential *need* for belonging or togetherness stemming from a long history of post-war French philosophy and critical theory focusing on ideas of collectivity over the individual were of overwhelming relevance. This line of enquiry also leads to the dismissal of contemporary anxieties surrounding ongoing class struggle, and relationships between art and society being overlooked. This thesis has attempted to remedy some of the socio-historical context that is lacking from accounts of 'relational' art which usually begins with Bourriaud's birth and ends with 'Traffic'. The accounts offered here are by no means exhaustive and have been written in such a way so as to construct a narrative that support's the thesis' initial objective of 'reconsidering *Relational Aesthetics*'. With all things *reconsidered*, there are, and will be, particularities that have been favoured over others; such an approach seems necessary to a research project that is premised on investigating the socio-historical shaped holes that are absent from preceding analyses of *Relational Aesthetics*. However, the effort to *reconsider* 'relational' art, here, has been undertaken with a degree of distance that allows for scepticism, and at times bewilderment, to be overruled by an underlying commitment to offering sources democratic appraisal and fair inclusion in this thesis.

Mediations on the Archive

Foucault's critique of the history of ideas and de Certeau's critique of historiography, which have been discussed in relation to the *Documents: 24*, and *39 Objets de grève*, both highlight the issues at play in offering a conception of history premised on a singular narrative, or of history 'trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations'.⁶⁰² Needless to say, it can be argued that this is the basis for this project since throughout the thesis there has been a specific emphasis on using archival material in order to offer some form of explanation for the artworks discussed. It is as if the archival material

⁶⁰¹ Here, note the linguistic differences in how time is described in English and French. In English, time is something that is often 'spent' which in and of itself indicates its commodification and focus on time being used to monitor productivity. This is amplified further through sayings such as 'time well spent'. In French, the term *passer*, meaning to pass or go by, is used to describe time; for example, *le temps passe* [time passes by], or *j'ai passé du temps dans le jardin* [I passed time, rather than spent time, in the garden]. In French, the verb to spend, *dépenser*, is not used to describe time, and is only used in the context of spending capital.

⁶⁰² Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 7.

somehow *justifies* the opinions being put forth; the dates that coincide with one another can be positioned in such a way that makes events seem more than just happenstance. As Foucault notes: 'The document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally *memory*; history is one way in which a society recognises and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked'.⁶⁰³ At the start of this research project there was a deliberate decision made to not write in the first person. Whilst *I* am aware that *I* am the person visiting archives, *I* am sifting through sources and *I* am piecing together what might, for want of a better word, be called 'evidence', these processes have not been an individual task, nor can any possible conclusions be perceived as the product of individual labour. *I* am not *the* writer of history. *I* am not able to articulate every utterance associated with *Relational Aesthetics*. Although every effort has been made to leave no stone unturned, there are inevitably bits of gravel that will remain scattered across disciplinary fields, acting as 'evidence' of the many possible histories that could have been, or are yet to be written in this area. As a researcher, the idea of using archival material, or *documents*, is essential to the writing of potential histories, and it is this point which *I* would like to emphasise. Although *I* can acknowledge the complexities and contradictions of using archival material for research, *I*, too, can fall into the traps of organising information in a way that seeks to *prove* the initial aims of this research; *Relational Aesthetics* went unnoticed in France, thus explaining away the absence of Francophone critiques; strike action in the mid-1990s in France was unprecedented – here are some statistics that verify this claim; the *Gilets Jaunes* movement is nothing new and not to be viewed in isolation – see the 1960s and 1990s for further examples of protests in France, and so on. Whilst this thesis relies on some of these particular tropes and conventions that have become commonly understood as helping to write histories, there is also an acknowledgement of how such practices might limit the research that is produced. This research project is interested in context but is, too, a product of *its* own, personal context which inevitably encroaches on the ability to offer unbiased accounts.

Here, too, it is worth reflecting on the usage of archival material over interviews with the artists and thinkers discussed. Why is it that contextual information from archives and secondary sources were favoured over information coming directly from those involved, those with experience of the potential relations facilitated by the artworks discussed? To a certain extent, the reliance on secondary sources was born out of practicality. After making efforts to contact artists and gallerists involved with *Relational Aesthetics* it soon became apparent that they were not interested in, or in some cases even responsive to, requests to discuss their work in this capacity. Another option would have been to attempt to trace those who participated in 'relational' artworks in the 1990s, but putting out a call for people who potentially

⁶⁰³ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 7.

ate a pad Thai with strangers, or saw a photograph of a house that was not officially registered as a house or used for an artwork because it remained an abstract idea seemed somewhat convoluted. A cynic might come to the conclusion that for all the talk of ‘interhuman relationships’, ‘spaces of conviviality’ and ‘community’, that the artists and thinkers featured in this thesis were already satisfied with their pre-existing relations. What happens when ‘relational’ artists are not interested in a ‘relationship’ with a researcher, or, more generally, are just not interested? Is this something to be taken personally? Should the project evolve to cater to the demands of an individual in the hope of getting a golden nugget of a quote? After some short-lived deliberations, the answer to this question was a firm ‘no’. In the same way that *I* cannot write a whole history of *Relational Aesthetics* alone, nor can those who were involved. This raises wider questions surrounding authorship and the authority with which particular voices are rewarded; what would have happened if Bourriaud disagreed with my claims, or if Parreno refuted my insistence of describing his work as ‘relational’? In the process of struggling to arrange interviews or be taken seriously, something that is probably the result of being a PhD student as opposed to a ‘more-established’ researcher or journalist offering promises of media coverage, there was a realisation that *I* am writing one of many possible interpretations of *Relational Aesthetics*, and that this iteration is dependent on a multitude of perspectives and voices being heard. There is a danger, too, that in relying on conducting interviews with those involved, that too much onus is placed on the opinions of a limited few, something that is at odds with the context for this study and arguments made that ‘relational’ art is unmistakably linked to a social context that demonstrated the potential of collective endeavours and struggle. Whilst it is my name that, perhaps somewhat foolishly, appears on the cover of this project, it is not *I* that is responsible for its contents. The contents or ‘findings’ of this research have only been made possible through the collective efforts of those involved in creating and documenting recent histories in France, of those artists and audiences primed for participatory practices, of the workers and publics involved in industrial action and political reform, of those critics who have critiqued before. In stating this, *I* am not attempting to create distance between myself and *my* work, but instead reiterate that in reconsidering *Relational Aesthetics*, this project offers an alternate history, an alternate history amongst many histories that might be ascribed to the objects, artworks and theories discussed. The ideas put forth are, indeed, the result of using archival material to find ‘relations’ and ‘unities’, but the explanations put forward are simply one of many possibilities as to the interpretations that may be reached after consulting such material.

So, Where Next? A Possible Future for *Relational Aesthetics*

The label of ‘relational’ art and ‘relational aesthetics’ does not seem to be going anywhere. Despite only appearing for the first time in the mid-1990s, and the term not being popularised

until the early 2000s, 'relational aesthetics' has come to describe and, some might argue, define contemporary art in a way that has not been seen since the usage of the term 'performance art' entered popular vernacular in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In its earliest usage, 'relational' art was a term used to describe the potential connections between artists exhibiting in the 'Traffic' exhibition but since then these connections have been questioned; for example, artist and critic Joe Scanlan has argued that 'relational aesthetics promoted a forced conviviality and a shared material paucity that cracked as soon as each of its loosely affiliated artists had too much at stake'.⁶⁰⁴ As soon as *Relational Aesthetics* was translated into English in 2002 it received criticism for its lack of critical rigour and 'specious treatment' of the issues which were purportedly at its heart.⁶⁰⁵ In spite of this, 'relational' art became the subject of many exhibitions and biennales, a term that was used to define almost anything and everything art-related, from retrospectively ascribing the term 'relational' to the practices of artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark and Franz Erhard Walther, the 2012 Sydney Biennale being premised on the notion of 'relationism' and 'interconnectedness' in bringing together the work of Lee Mingwei and Nadia Myre alongside Eva Kot'átková's performances, to Rafael Lozano-Hemmer using 'relational aesthetics' as the basis to develop practices of 'Relational Architecture'.⁶⁰⁶ The criticism of the term in Anglophone circles seems to have had little success in quelling its usage. That is not to say that the objective of such critiques was to eradicate the source material in the first place, but rather the critiques served a purpose in raising debate around some of the text's seemingly glaring inconsistencies. However, the academic disdain for *Relational Aesthetics* has continued. In recent literature of the past decade the idea of 'relational aesthetics' seems tired, a sign of the past, dull. Let us not forget the *Artforum* article that opened with 'What makes relational aesthetics so boring?'⁶⁰⁷ 'Relational' art is not considered tasteful, whatever that may mean, or interesting. It does not seem as if it will be remembered favourably, or, to quote an essay by the art historian and critic Sven Lütticken, 'relational aesthetics helped inaugurate an era of bland biennale art and project-based ubiquity'.⁶⁰⁸ Even today, twenty-five years after *Relational Aesthetics* was

⁶⁰⁴ Joe Scanlan, 'The Uses of Disorder: The Art of Felix Gonzalez-Torres', *Artforum*, 2 (2010), 162-170, (p. 167).

⁶⁰⁵ Scanlan, 'The Uses of Disorder', p. 167.

⁶⁰⁶ Adrian Searle, 'How Gordon Matta-Clark took a Chainsaw to 70s New York', *The Guardian*, 30 November 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/nov/30/gordon-matta-clark-new-york-art-deconstruction>> [accessed 30 June 2020]; Roberta Smith, 'A Time to Play, in a Flashback to the '70s Art World', *The New York Times*, 27 April 2010 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/28/arts/design/28walther.html>> [accessed 28 June 2020]; Chris Reid, 'Biennale of Sydney: A Relational Biennale', *Real Time*, 112 (2012), 10, (p. 10); Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, 'Utterance 4 – Relational Architecture', *Performance Research*, 4:2 (1999), 52-56.

⁶⁰⁷ Scanlan, 'Social Space and Relational Aesthetics', p. 123.

⁶⁰⁸ Lütticken, [accessed 9 July 2020].

mentioned for the first time in an article in *Documents sur l'Art* in 1995, the critical responses to the text remain on a par with those that appeared when it was first published and translated.

Yet, in spite of this, even though the term 'relational aesthetics' seems to have firmly rooted itself in discourses of contemporary art, there still seems to be confusion surrounding what 'relational' art *actually* is and can be. This is not to say, however, that there can be strict categorisations or classifications surrounding what 'relational' art *is* and what it *is not*, what it *should* or *should not* be. Instead, there needs to be some scepticism in the usage of the term itself. In this sense, what is it to *be* 'relational'? In and of itself this is a daft question; is it artworks that invite participation, events that create 'possible encounters', or works that celebrate conviviality? Can objects be 'relational', or *should* 'relational' art seek to manifest in performances or public spaces? These are impossible questions, but also questions that remain as relevant today as they did when 'Traffic' first opened in 1996. Although the 'relational' aspect of the artworks encountered in this exhibition and subsequent displays of 'relational art' is debateable, one thing that these works had and continue to have in common is the variety of mediums, ranging from paintings and installations to video-based work, site-specific sculptures and performances. This lack of definition is perhaps what is most puzzling about *Relational Aesthetics*, a term which, unlike many others used in art history, confuses rather than clarifies. If somebody is asked to discuss 'performance art', a respondent might suggest that this is art that involves an artist using their body in a setting that may have an audience and may relate to conceptual art in some way shape or form. Similarly, if asked about 'pop art', a respondent might mention primary colours, bold shapes, everyday objects being reimagined in conceptual arrangements alongside paintings that resemble comic books. But, if asked about 'relational' art, the output is somewhat more difficult to discern. If human relations are taken as the base level for *Relational Aesthetics* then this can encompass a whole manner of things, from a viewer's response to a painting, to exchanging goods and services, to participating in a bus tour of an industrial estate in Bordeaux as organised by Huyghe for 'Traffic'. In a discipline and contemporary art scene that claims to thrive on experimentation but takes comfort in the strict definitions of pinpointing *what* an artwork might be, 'relational' art seems to be out of place, or, maybe, it is contemplating and biding its time awaiting 'possible encounters'.

Although *au fait* to many, perhaps the key to 'relational aesthetics' is its ability to confuse and shake off precision. In spite of being displayed more often than not in the white-walled galleries of commercial dealers, 'relational' art is messy. It lacks precision and, for this reason, people cannot demand of it too much. With relational art comes an odd sort of entanglement, one that attempts to navigate across multiple modalities and mediums. Artworks are supposedly interested in interaction, but, as has been argued in this thesis, this supposed interest in forming relationships must have been born out of a wider call for

(inter)action within society. This odd entanglement, where art meets life and art *is* life but art can also be some strangers chatting; a strange network of art that facilitates possible encounters which may also be moments and representative of interests in time and its commodification, but might also promote exchange in interstices informed by the context in which such artworks are facilitated. The time in which we found ourselves is, as we have been told repeatedly from various outlets, 'unprecedented', but this particular moment is not one that can be considered in isolation. Whilst the *Gilets Jaunes* movement and its weekly *manifestations* have stalled due to temporary laws restricting mass gatherings, and the ballet dancers returned to work to perform on the stage of the Palais Garnier at the end of January 2020, the spirit which inspired them, and many other generations of people in France before them, lives on, evolves and adapts to the challenges that it is facing. In a time where the contemporary is confusing and oftentimes tiresome, 'relational' art can maybe be used to offer some order. On the one hand, the 'relationality' of 'relational' art remains idiosyncratic and impalpable, yet, at the same time, there is something to be said for embracing the confusion that it evokes. 'Relational' art and 'relational aesthetics', through its defiance to comply or appear interesting to a context that is inherently critical and everchanging is something to be considered in further detail, and possibly admired. *Relational Aesthetics* may well have had its heyday, but it is still a term that is on everybody's lips, and the lips keep talking.



Fig. 1. 'Traffic' [installation view], 1996, photograph. Courtesy of CAPC Bordeaux, Bordeaux.



Fig. 2. Frédéric Desmesure, 'Traffic' - *photo des artistes*, 26 janvier 1996, 1996, photograph. Courtesy of CAPC Bordeaux, Bordeaux.

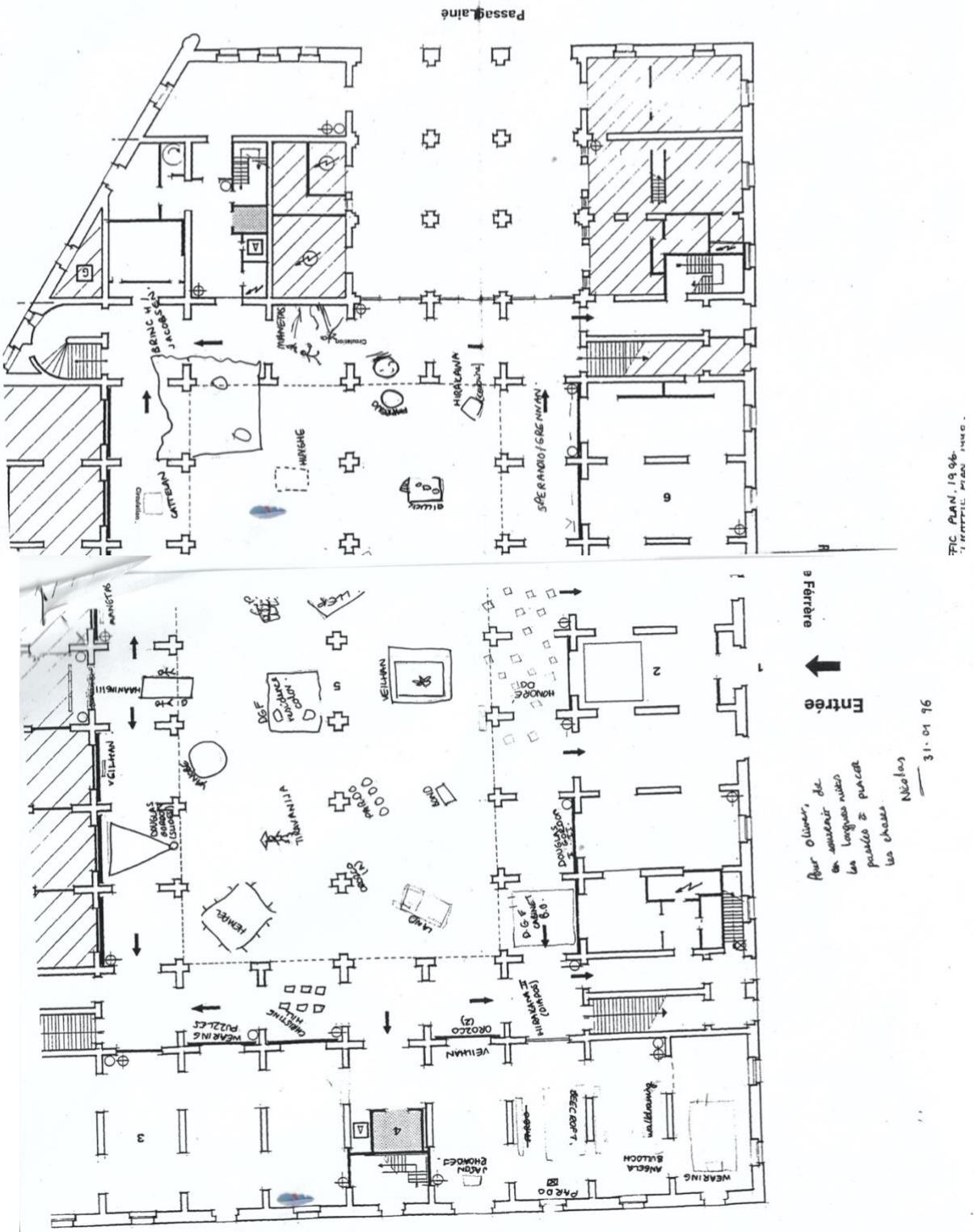


Fig. 3. 'Traffic' [installation layout/curatorial plan], 1996, photograph. Courtesy of CAPC Bordeaux, Bordeaux.



Fig. 4. Frédéric Desmesure, 'Traffic' – *photo de Pierre Huyghe's Singing in the Rain, 26 janvier 1996, 1996, photograph. Courtesy of CAPC Bordeaux, Bordeaux.*

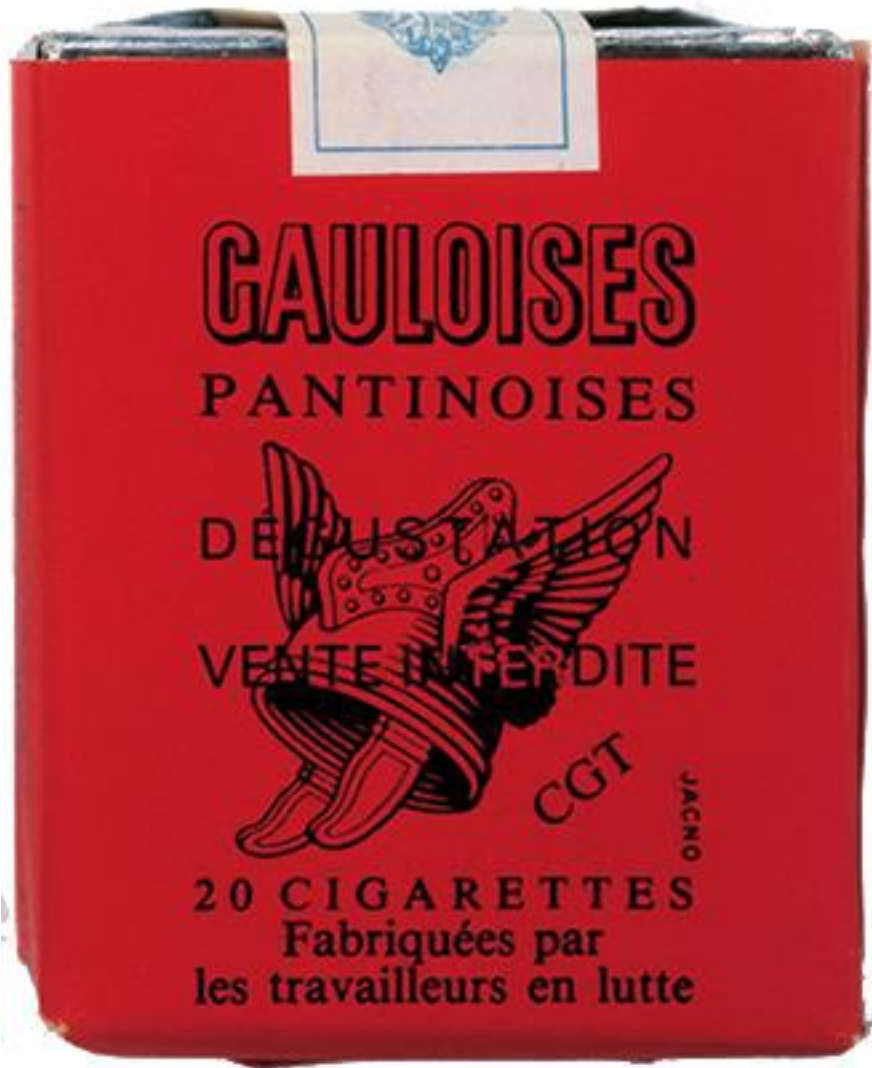


Fig. 5. Jean-Luc Moulène, *24 Objets de grève* [Un paquet de cigarette “Gauloises” rouge, la “Pantinoise”: 7 x 5.8 x 2.3 cm, 1982 [a red packet of ‘Gauloises’ cigarettes (1982), 7 x 5.8 x 2.3 cm], 1999, photograph, 42 x 21.3 cm. Courtesy of RMN Grand Palais, Paris.

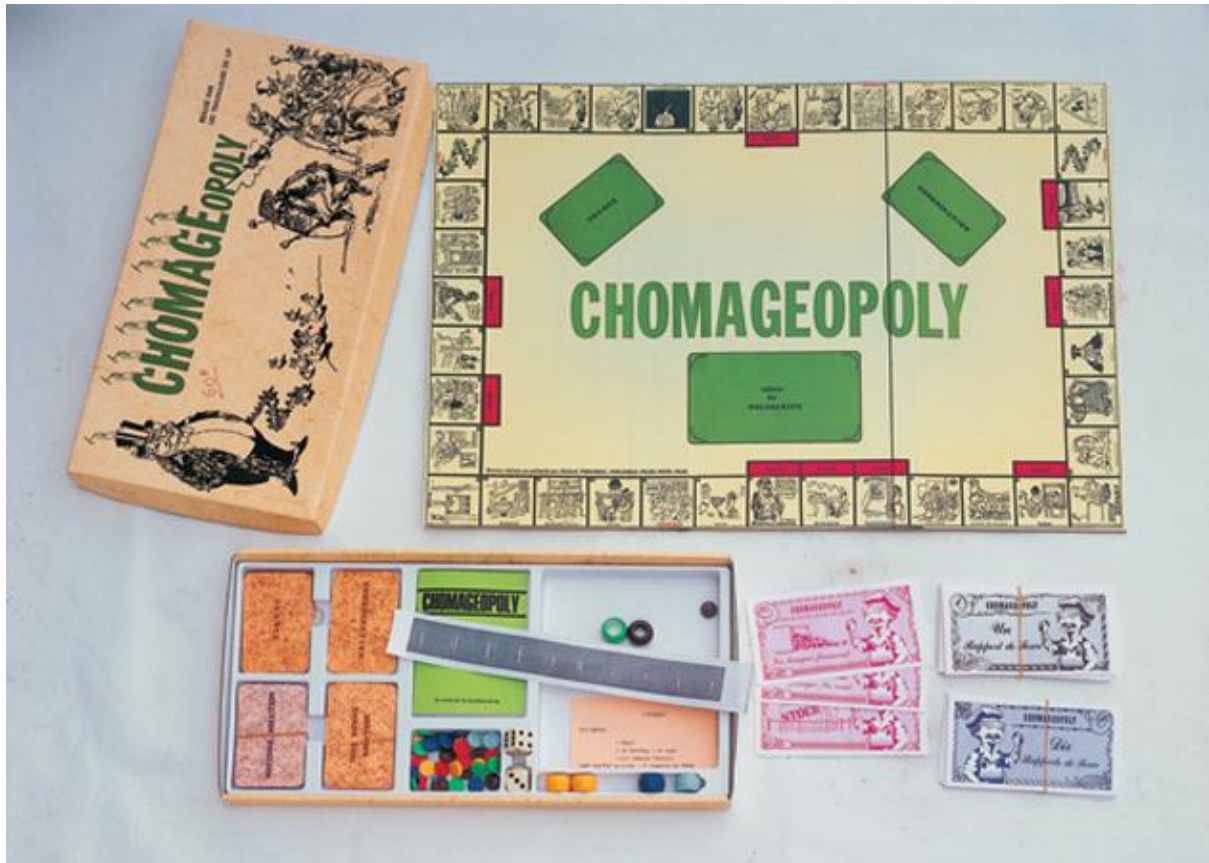


Fig. 6. Jean-Luc Moulène, *24 Objets de grève* [Striking LIP workers, *Chômageopoly*, c. 1974, boardgame, 40.5 x 59 cm], 1999, photograph, 42 x 21.3 cm. Courtesy of Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.



Fig. 7. Jean-Luc Moulène, *24 Objets de grève*, 1999, photograph, 42 x 21.3 cm [Striking Myrys workers, '*Les souliers de la lutte. Souliers couleurs <<foot>>*' ['The shoes of the fight. Red and black 'football' shoes], c. 1995, leather. Courtesy of Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris.



Fig. 8. Rebecca Starr, *Les souliers de la lutte – CGT detail*, 2019, photograph. Courtesy of Archives nationales du monde du travail, Roubaix.



Fig. 9. Matthieu Laurette, *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* 2001 [installation view] (1993-2003) installation, photograph. Courtesy of Palais de Tokyo, Paris.

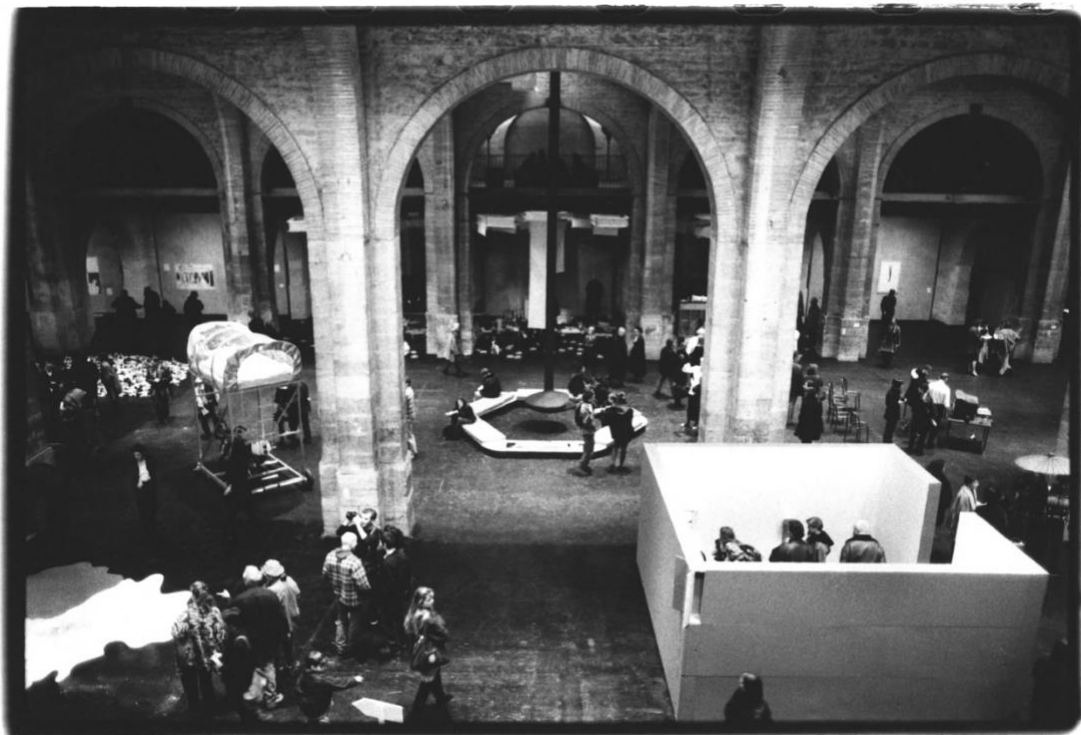
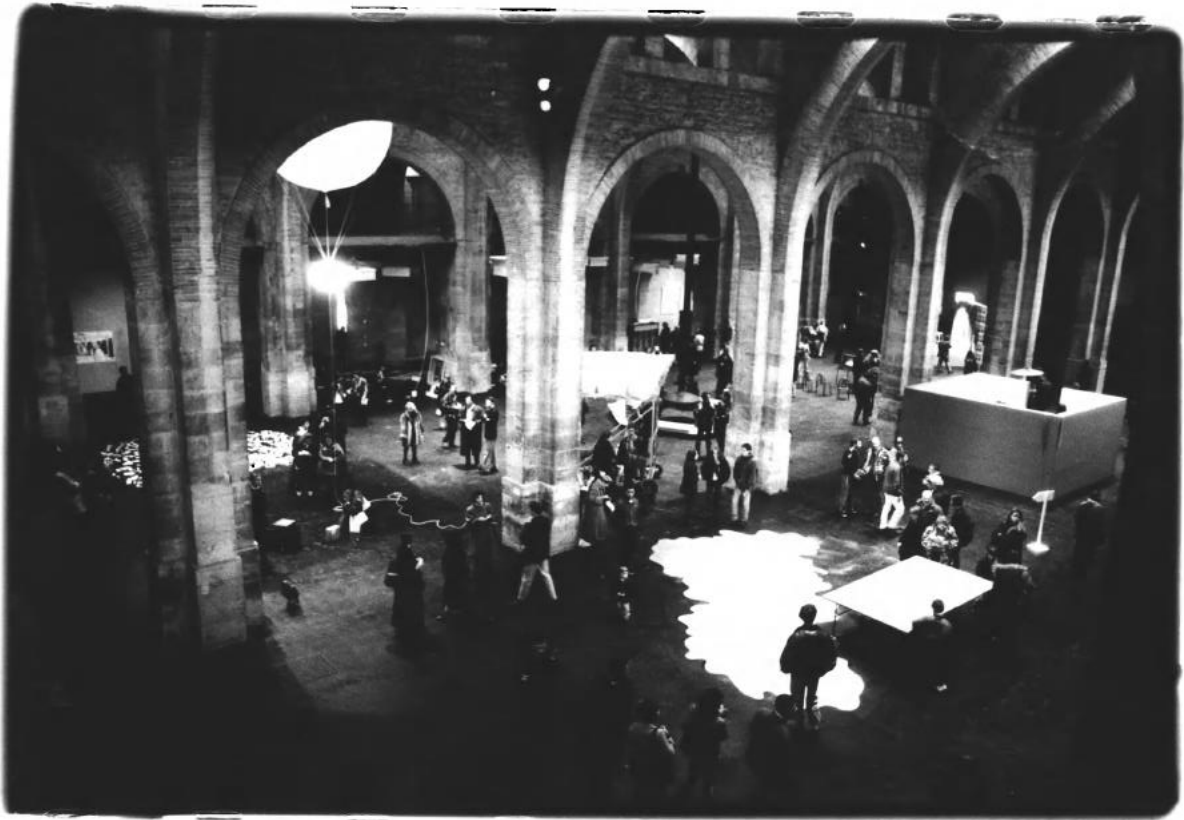


Fig. 10. 'Traffic' [installation views], 1996, photograph. Courtesy of CAPC Bordeaux, Bordeaux.



Fig. 11. Matthieu Laurette, *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* (1993-2003) [bus], photograph. Courtesy of the artist.

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- Mardi 14 octobre**
11 h place Candoux
16 h place des Dervallières
- Mercredi 15 octobre**
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19 h cinéma Concorde
- Judi 16 octobre**
8 h place Zola (marché)
19 h conférence Maison de quartier des Dervallières
- Vendredi 17 octobre**
16 h place Zola
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Nouvelles Galeries, 23 septembre 1997.
- « *Pour faire des économies y'a plus d'une idée dans la tête à Matthieu.* »
Valérie Bédouin, Le genre à la télé, France 5, 04 mai 1996.
- « *Matthieu Laurette a crié, en cette période de crise, un principe d'économie légère, une sorte de « sécurité sociale alimentaire.* »
Christine Balle, Météo, juillet 1996.
- « *Matthieu Laurette, nous êtes le roi du coupon-remboursé.* »
Julien Confès, Sans aucun doute, RTL, 22 mars 1997.
- « *Demain, on mange gratis!* »
Pascale Lemerle, Le Monde, 16 mai 1997.
- « *Le consommateur est un fin stratège, les marques proposent de rembourser les produits, lui il les prend au mot.* »
Caroline March, Journaux Hebdomadaires France 2, 53 à et 56 h, 16 mai 1997.
- « *Matthieu Laurette, 26 ans, change depuis 4 ans les produits remboursés.* »
François de Chailhous, Réponse à tout, août 1997.

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Fig. 12. Matthieu Laurette, *Produits remboursés/Moneyback Products* (1991-2001) [leaflet], photograph. Courtesy of the artist.



Fig. 13. “No Man’s Time’ [installation view featuring the following artworks: Manuel Ismora, *Sans titre* (1991); Philippe Parreno, *No More Reality* (1991); Karen Kilimnik, *Madonna before she got famous* (1991); Xavier Veilhan, *Les arbes* (1991); Pruitt-Early, *Sans titre* (1991)], 1991 photograph. Courtesy of Villa Arson, Nice.



Fig. 14. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, *Son esprit vert fit autour d'elle un monde vert, 1^{re} et 2^e partie* [*Her green mind made a green world around her, part 1 and 2*] 1991, table, 2 chairs, 2 photographs, 126 x 127.5 x 130 cm, photograph. Courtesy of Villa Arson, Nice.

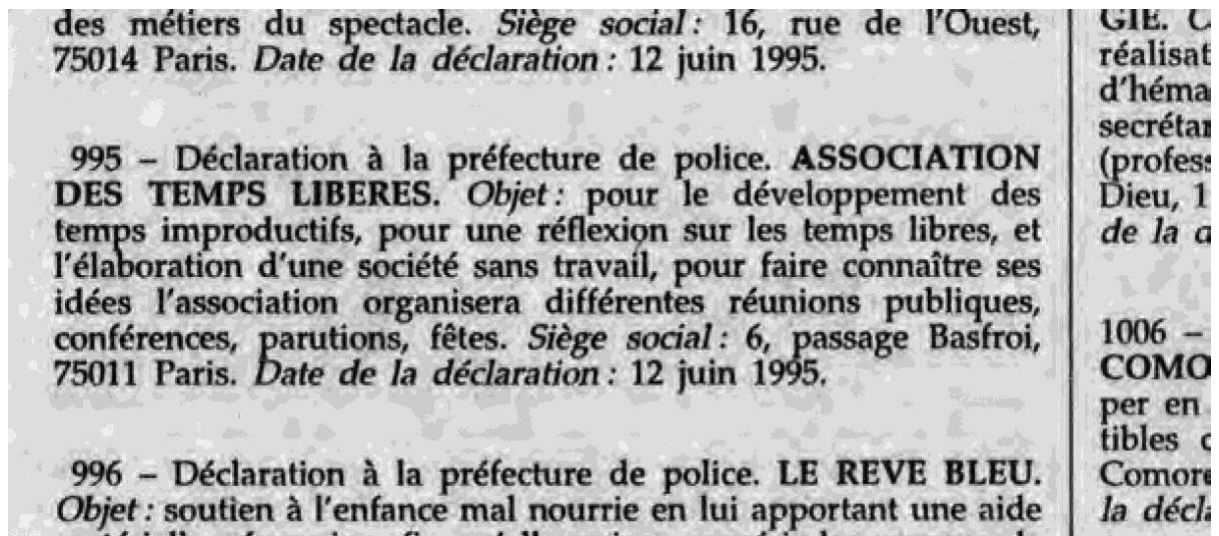


Fig. 15. Pierre Huyghe, *L'Association des Temps Libérés* [extract from *Journal Officiel*, July 5th, 1995], 1995, photograph. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery.



Fig. 16. Pierre Huyghe, *Le procès du temps libre, Part I: Indices* [*The Trial of Free Time, Part I: Clues*] [installation view at Secession Gallery, Vienna, 1999], 1999, photograph. Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.

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